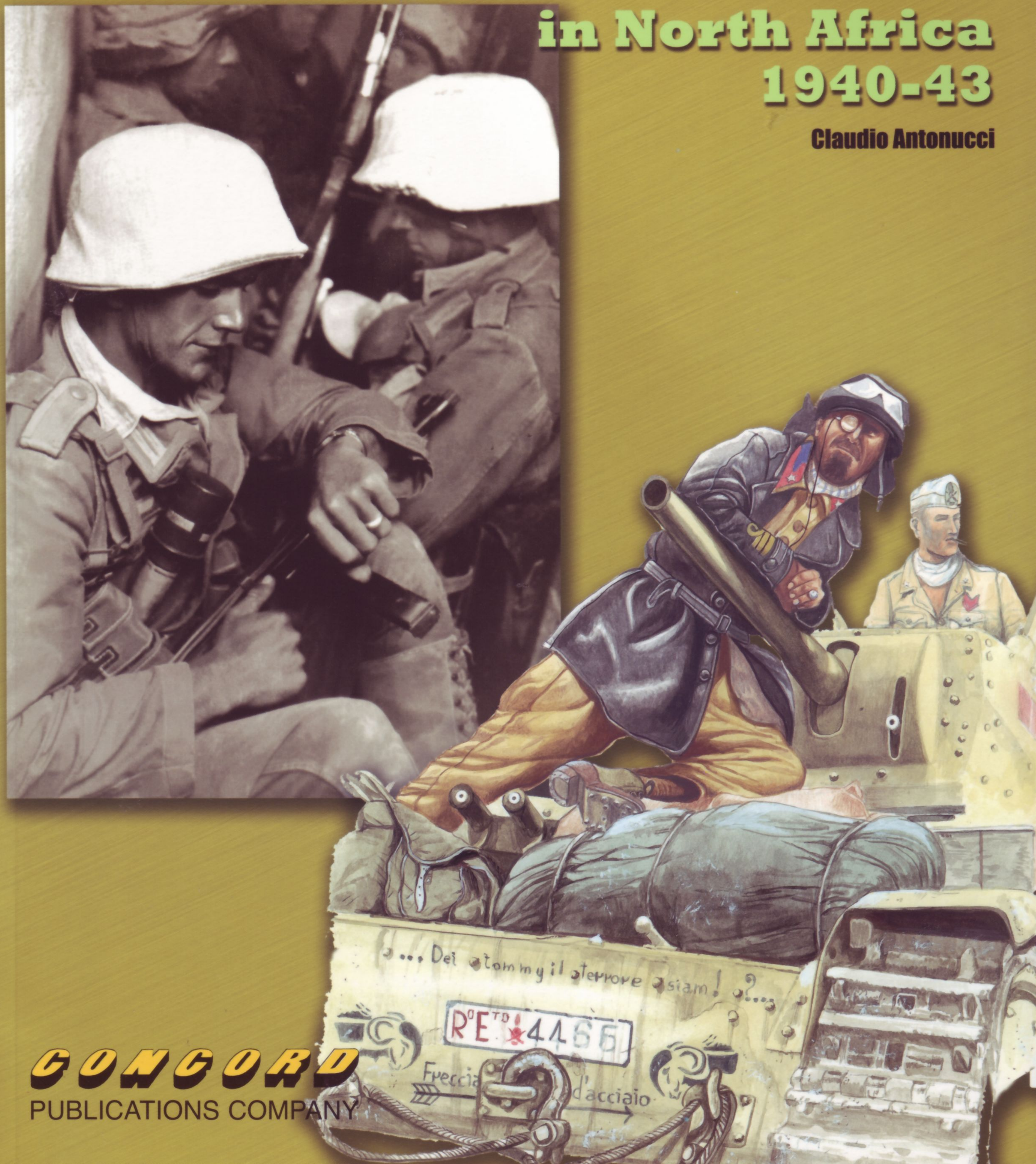
6521

Axis Forces
in North Africa 1940-43

Claudio Antonucci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Axis Forces

in North Africa 1940-43

Text & Color Plates by Claudio Antonucci

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my father, who provided a valuable education in history to me, and to my uncle, G. Verdone, a former sergeant of the Italian Artillery at Tobruk in 1941.

Special thanks to Dr. Bizzarri for his patience during the research into pictorial evidence; to Dr. Crociani for some invaluable suggestions; and finally to Mr. Leung for his great encouragement and effort invested in this book, including his interest in incorporating German photographs in this volume.

Mr. Forniti also typed all of my original manuscript. My personal thanks go to Dr. Rossini for the use of photos from his personal collection.

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INTRODUCTION

Although a great deal of attention has been paid to the North African Campaign (especially to the legendary figure of Rommel), there remains a huge amount of little-known photographs, literature and documentary footage that depicts various fascinating aspects of Axis soldiers in the western desert. This material deserves attention, and some has been reproduced in this volume.

This book is a study of uniforms and associated equipment. It is based on accounts of veterans, contemporary written reports, photographs, war documentaries and authentic relics. The text included in this volume is intended to be a concise yet comprehensive record of the period from September 1940 to May 1943.

The author's original artwork is based upon contemporary photographs, illustrating the actual rather than imaginary appearance of German and Italian fighting men in North Africa.

CHRONOLOGY

September 1940

The Italian Army in North Africa, under Graziani, the Marshal of Italy and Governor of Libya, attacked across the Egyptian frontier. At that time, the territory of Egypt was under British occupation. This attack advanced east as far as the towns of Sollum and Sidi Barrani.

Graziani's forces in North Africa included the 5th Army, commanded by *Generale d'Armata* (Army General) Gariboldi and the 10th Army, under *Generale d'Armata* Berti. The 5th Army, located in Tripolitania (western Libya) initially consisted mainly of X, XX and XXIII Corps. The 10th Army, located in Cyrenaica (eastern Libya), initially consisted mainly of XXI and XXII Corps, but later X and XX Corps were also sent to Cyrenaica.

X Army Corps, led by *Generale di Corpo d'Armata* (Lieutenant General) Barbieri included the following infantry divisions:

- *Bologna* - led by *Generale di Divisione (*Major General) Lerici, comprising the 39th and 40th Infantry Regiments, plus the 10th Artillery Regiment.
- *Sabratha* - commanded by *Generale di Divisione* Della Bona, comprising the 85th and 86th Infantry Regiments, plus the 42nd Artillery Regiment.
- *Savona* - commanded by *Generale di Divisione* Maggiani, including the 15th and 16th Infantry Regiments, plus the 12th Artillery Regiment.

XX Army Corps, commanded by *Generale di Corpo d'Armata* Cona, included:

- *Pavia* Division - with the 27th and 28th Infantry Regiments, plus the 26th Artillery Regiment (*Generale di Divisione* Zaglio).
- *Brescia* Division (*Generale di Divisione* Cremascoli) - comprising the 19th and 20th Infantry Regiments, plus the 55th Artillery Regiment.
- *Sirte* Division (*Generale* Della Mura) - with the 69th and 70th Infantry Regiments, and 43rd Artillery Regiment.

XXIII Army Corps, under *Generale di Corpo d'Armata* Bergonzoli, included:

- 1st *23 Marzo* Blackshirt Division with the CCXIX and CCXXXIII Legions, plus the 201st Artillery Regiment.
- 2nd *28 Ottobre* Blackshirt Division with the CCXXXI and CCXXXVIII Legions, plus the 202nd Artillery Regiment.
- In reserve for these Army Corps were the 2nd Libyan Division (*Generale di Divisione* Pescatori), with the 3rd and 4th Groups, and 2nd Artillery Group.

XXI Army Corps (*Generale di Corpo d'Armata* Dalmazzo) included:

- the Marmarica Division (*Generale* Tracchia), which included the 115th and 116th Infantry Regiments, plus the 44th Artillery Regiment.
- *Cirene* Division (*Generale di Divisione* Spatocco) with the 157th and 158th Infantry Regiments, plus the 45th Artillery Regiment.

XXII Army Corps, under *Generale di Corpo d'Armata* Pitassi Mannella comprised:

- *Catanzaro* Division (*Generale* Stefanelli) with the 141st and 142nd Infantry Regiments, plus the 203rd Artillery Regiment.
- 4th *3 Gennaio* Blackshirt Division (*Generale* Merzari) with the CCL and CCLXX Legions, plus the 204th Artillery Regiment.
- In reserve were the 1st Libyan Division commanded by *Generale* Sibille, with the 1st and 2nd Groups, and 1st Artillery Group.

Although Marshal Graziani was a professional commander with experience in the African War of Ethiopia in 1936, he soon suffered a serious shortage of supplies and faced problems fielding enough trained senior officers. Therefore, his advance into Egypt ground to a halt.

Contrary to postwar propaganda, in North Africa Graziani had a powerful force of 339 tanks and armored cars, a total of 1,811 guns, and as many as 3,787 vehicles! The armored force comprised L3/33, L3/35, and l6/40 light tanks (several of them L3/33-35 flamethrower versions). There were also M11/39 medium tanks, which were organized in *Generale* Maletti's Group (from December 1940). Finally there were light armored cars of the Ansaldo Lancia 1 ZM type, plus AB 40 medium armored cars. In addition, the Fifth Air Squadron of Libya had 300 aircraft.

Generale Bergonzoli in his XXXIII Army Corps had his own armored group. Attached to this group there was also a Sahara Libyan Troop Command that included a Saharan Battalion, Light Armored Car Companies, and a Parachute Battalion. All of these units were composed of Libyans, led by *Generale* Gallina, and trained for desert warfare. Further to this was attached the following units: a Libyan Battalion, a Machine Gun Company, a Camel Battery of 65/17 guns, and two Heavy 20mm Machine Gun Sections.

December 1940

The Commander-in-Chief of the Commonwealth forces in the Western Desert, General Sir Archibald Wavell, received some 150 armored vehicles from Britain and counterattacked against Italian garrisons along the Egyptian border. This was known as "Operation Compass". The 4th Indian Division and the 7th Armoured Division captured the Italian camps at Nibeiwa, Tummar and Sidi Barrani. Despite this setback, the well-trained Libyan troops of the Maletti Group fought to the death. British Commonwealth troops captured around 38,000 Italians, 237 artillery pieces and 73 tanks. Wavell replaced the 4th Indian Division with the 6th Australian Division, which subsequently drove out all Italian forces from the Egyptian frontier.

January 1941

In Africa, the Italian Army began the New Year under an unlucky star. O'Connor's Western Desert Force (or XIII Corps) advanced deep into the Italian colony of Libya, capturing the important population centers of Bardia, Tobruk, Derna and Benghazi. With its tank regiments, the Allied force also reached Beda Fomm, where they won a resounding victory in February 1941.

In addition to the Italian forces that have been listed already, the following units were now added to those that were in-theater:
- Group of *Generale* Maletti with the I, V, XVII and XIX Libyan Battalions
- I Saharan Battalion
- II Armored Battalion
- one artillery group with 65/17 guns, and one artillery group with 75/27 field guns
- two anti-tank companies (47/32 guns)
- one 81mm mortar company
- a heavy artillery battery with 105/28 guns

The Special Armored Brigade of General Balbini fought with a measure of valor at El Mechili. This brigade was composed of a battalion of M11/39 medium tanks, two battalions of new M13/40 medium tanks, one battalion of motorcyclist *Bersaglieri*, one battalion of light tanks, an artillery group of 75/27 guns, and another of 100/17 heavy guns. Usually the light tanks and armored cars were organized in light armored battalions and cavalry squadrons. In addition, light and medium tanks were also deployed in independent battalions.

By the time of their victory at Beda Fomm, the British XIII Corps had captured more than 130,000 Italians (including twenty-two generals), 845 guns and 380 armored vehicles. After such a disaster for the Italian Empire in Africa, Mussolini relieved the unreliable Graziani, and instead gave supreme command in North Africa to General Gariboldi (the former commander of the 5th Army).

Undoubtedly, Graziani commanded a powerful force in North Africa, but unfortunately he fought a colonial campaign rather than a modern mechanized war in the desert. In a letter, Graziani complained to the *Duce*: "Your Excellency obliged me to fight a war against an elephant with a flea!"

February – April 1941

Defeat in the first Libyan campaign obliged Mussolini to accept Hitler's offer of help. This offer included a German armored force led by *Generalleutnant* (Lieutenant General) Rommel.

Thus, from now on, *Generale* Gariboldi would play only a supporting role in the campaign. The newly created *Deutsches Afrika-Korps (DAK)* arrived in Libya from 12 February. Rommel had soon organized his force in North Africa as follows:
- 5th *leichte* (Light) Division commanded by *Generalmajor* (Major General) Johannes Streich. This division included:
  - 5th Panzer Regiment
  - 200th Rifle Regiment (2nd and 8th Machine Gun Battalions)
  - 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion
  - 39th and 605th *Panzerjäger* (Anti-Tank) Battalions
  - 606th Self-Propelled Anti-Aircraft Battalion
  - 75th Artillery Regiment
  - 1/33rd *Luftwaffe* Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- 15th Panzer Division led by *Generalmajor* Hans-Karl von Esebeck, composed of:
  - 8th Panzer Regiment
  - 15th *Schützen* (Rifle) Brigade
  - 33rd Artillery Regiment
  - 33rd Reconnaissance Battalion
  - 33rd *Panzerjäger* Battalion
  - 33rd Pioneer Battalion

Italian troops fielded in North Africa included the newly arrived *Ariete* Armored Division. This incorporated the 32nd Tank Regiment, the 8th *Bersaglieri* Regiment, and the 132nd Armored Artillery Regiment (equipped with the modern and powerful *Semoventi* 75/18 self-propelled gun, arriving in April 1941). This division was commanded by *Generale di Divisione* Baldassarre.

Generale Nuvoloni led the Motorized Division named *Trento*. It comprised the 61st and 62nd Infantry Regiments, the 46th Motorized Artillery Regiment, and the 7th *Bersaglieri* Regiment. There was also the *Brescia* Division (*Generale di Divisione* Zambon) with its 19th and 20th Infantry Regiments, plus the 1st Artillery Regiment – *Celere* (Fast). The *Pavia* Division (*Generale* Giglioli) had its 27th and 28th Infantry Regiments, plus the 3rd *Celere* Artillery Regiment. The *Bologna* Division (Generale Marghinotti) fielded its 39th and 40th Infantry Regiments, plus the 205th Artillery Regiment.

At this time all the territory of Italian Cyrenaica was still occupied by Commonwealth forces. However, the Italian garrison at Giarabub Oasis (commanded by Colonel Castagna) resisted for over five months. On 21 March 1941, the garrison of Giarabub was finally overcome by Australian forces. Nevertheless, Giarabub was perhaps one of the most heroic episodes of the Italian desert war. Rommel reconquered the city of Benghazi via Agedabia, with a small task force including the 5th *leichte* Division, plus the Italian *Ariete* and *Brescia* Divisions.

April – May 1941

Although lacking in communications and reinforcements, Rommel's mixed army surrounded the British forces (based around the 9th Australian Division plus an extra brigade) that were now equipped with Italian spoils and were garrisoning Tobruk.

The *Trieste* Motorized Division attacked with Rommel's army, but the rest of the Italian divisions such as *Bologna*, *Sabratha* and *Savona* were demoralized and poorly equipped. The Italian High Command had trouble accepting Rommel's new methodology of rapid desert warfare Nevertheless, the Commonwealth garrisons at El Agheila, Mersa Brega and Mechili were overrun, and such important figures as General O'Connor and General Neame were captured. Savage combat also took place in Sollum, Halfaya Pass and Fort Capuzzo, as far eastwards as the Egyptian frontier.

May – June 1941

In the implacable desert summer, General Wavell attacked the Halfaya-Capuzzo line to reduce Axis pressure on Tobruk ("Operation Battleaxe"). However, his leadership did not rival the military genius of Rommel. For example, the tanks of the 4th and 7th Armoured Brigades, which had dramatically knocked out light M11/39 Italian tanks in December 1940, were now being fatally dealt with by German 8.8cm guns used in the anti-tank ole!

Rommel moved his Panzers through the desert in dramatic exploits, as previously seen in the Blitzkrieg in 1939 and 1940. Although Wavell still had plentiful supplies, he was soon to be replaced by General Sir Claude Auchinleck in late June 1941. The Commonwealth's "Western Desert Force" was renamed the 8th Army and General Cunningham was appointed as its commander.

July – October 1941

This was a period of static trench warfare. Meanwhile, RAF superiority in the Mediterranean skies ruled out the Axis conquest of Malta. In addition, the Royal Navy intercepted Italian supply convoys carrying provisions destined for Rommel's army.

November 1941

To resolve the static siege of Tobruk, Auchinleck ordered the launching of "Operation Crusader", including the employment of fresh forces such as the 1st Polish Brigade, the 32nd Army Tank Brigade, the 1st South African Division, and the 22nd Guards Brigade. In the preceding months, British tanks such as Matildas, Crusaders, Cruisers and Valentines were struggling against Rommel's more powerful Panzer IIIs and IVs. Thus, the U.S. government began supplying Stuart tanks (nicknamed "Honeys" by the British), combat aircraft, guns and clothing to British forces.

The *Ariete* and *Trieste* Mechanized Divisions commanded by General Gambara successfully defended Bir El Gobi. Here the volunteer Young Fascist Division fought heroically against the 7th Armoured Division and 11th Indian Brigade. In total, fifty British tanks were destroyed. The Italian armored regiments lacked heavy tanks and wrongly used its M (Medium) tanks in an assault role. These medium tanks would have been better employed as light infantry tanks.

The 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions countered Auchinleck's effort, but he advanced as far as the area around Sidi Rezegh with his XXX Corps to relieve the defenders of Tobruk.

It was only in late November 1941 that New Zealand troops of XIII Corps could link up with the Ed Duda stronghold (near Tobruk). Cunningham was replaced by General Ritchie, and Rommel, with no reinforcements, abandoned this battle to pressure the Tobruk area. Rommel subsequently retreated to Gazala, leaving as a rearguard two sacrificial divisions - *Savona* and *Brescia* that were arrayed along the Sollum – Halfaya - Bardia front (December 1941). The *Deutsches Afrika-Korps* lost 9,000 prisoners, whilst the Italians lost 23,000 captured, plus 382 tanks.

January 1942

New reinforcements arrived for Rommel's army, including Italian 75/18 self-propelled guns that rivaled the medium tanks of the 8th Army.

February 1942

Rommel's Army was now designated *Panzerarmee Afrika,* including three German divisions (90th *leichte*, 15th and 21st Panzer) and seven Italian divisions (*Pavia, Brescia, Trento, Bologna, Savona, Ariete* and *Sabratha*).

May – June 1942

Panzerarmee Afrika successfully attacked Ein El Gazala, but encountered fierce opposition from French troops at Bir Hakeim.

Trieste and *Pavia* soldiers clashed with strong British forces (led by the 1st and 7th Armoured Divisions) at the "Knightsbridge" positions. In the meantime, Axis forces had taken the Tobruk stronghold. The South Africans of the 2nd Division finally surrendered to *Ariete* and *Littorio* patrols. In total, 45,000 Commonwealth prisoners were taken and plentiful British stores, including fuel and vehicles (see plate F2). The port of Tobruk was now controlled by Axis air and naval forces. The desperate situation at Tobruk obliged Auchinleck to withdraw to the El Alamein line. Mussolini and Hitler planned to conquer Egypt as far as the strategically important Suez Canal.

Panzerarmee Afrika was now led by the newly promoted *Feldmarschall* (Field Marshal) Rommel. It included the old *Deutsches Afrika-Korps* (led by Generalleutnant Nehring) with:

- 15th Panzer Division (*Generalleutnant* Gustav von Vaerst) comprising the 8th Panzer Regiment, the 115th *Schützen* Regiment, the 33rd Artillery Regiment, the 33rd Reconnaissance Battalion, the 33rd Pioneer Battalion, and the 33rd *Panzerjäger* Battalion.
- 21st Panzer Division (*Generalmajor* Georg von Bismarck) with the 5th Panzer Regiment, the 104th *Schützen* Regiment, the 155th Artillery Regiment, the 39th *Panzerjäger* Battalion, the 200th Pioneer Battalion, and the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion.
- The 90th *leichte* Division (*Generalmajor* Ulrich Kleeman) including the 155th, 200th and 361st Infantry Regiments, the 361st Artillery Battalion, the 190th Artillery Regiment, the 580th Reconnaissance Battalion, the 190th *Panzerjäger* Battalion, and the 288th *Sonderverband*.

The Italian X Army Corps led by *Generale di Corpo d'Armata* Gioda had the *Brescia* Division with the 19th and 20th Infantry Regiments, plus the 1st Fast - *Celere* Artillery Regiment (*Generale* Lombardi). There was also the *Pavia* Division commanded by *Generale* Torriani comprising the 27th and 28th Infantry Regiments, and the 26th Artillery Regiment. This Army Corps was supported by the 9th *Bersaglieri* Regiment, the 16th Artillery Group, X Engineers, and XXXI Assault Engineer (*Guastatori*) Battalion.

The XX Army Corps (*Generale di Corpo d'Armata* Baldassarre) was composed of the *Trieste* Motorized Division (*Generale* Azzi), including the 65th and 66th "Motorized" Infantry Regiments, as well as the 21st Mechanized Artillery Regiment. There were also the XI Battalion of M13/40 medium tanks, the VIII Armored *Bersaglieri* Battalion (with new AB 40/41 armored cars), and LII Mechanized Engineer Battalion. *Generale* De Stefani was the commander of the *Ariete* Armored Division. This included the 132nd Armored Battalion (with light L6 – *Novara* Lancers – M11/39, M13/40, and M14/41 tanks), the 8th Motorized *Bersaglieri* Regiment, and the 132nd Motorized Artillery Regiment (with 75/27 field guns, 105/38 heavy guns, 90/53 guns on lorries – *autocannoni* – a group of 8.8cm flak guns of German origin, and two groups of 75/18 self-propelled guns or *Semoventi*). Support for XX Army Corps included the *Nizza* Cavalry Regiment (with AB 41 armored cars), the 8th Artillery Regiment, and XXXIV Special Engineer Battalion.

Finally, the *Generale di Corpo d'Armata* Navarrini had the *Trento* Motorized Division (*Generale* Gotti) with the 61st and 62nd Infantry Regiments, plus the 46th Artillery Regiment. The *Sabratha* Division (*Generale* Soldanelli) incorporated the 85th and 86th Infantry Regiments, and the 3rd *Celere* Artillery

Regiment. There was also the 15th *Schützen* Brigade under *Oberst* Menny, comprising the 200th and 361st Regiments, 528th and 535th Artillery Regiments, and the 612th Flak Group.

July 1942

Auchinleck personally took command of his troops bolstered by 160 U.S. Grant medium tanks. During the following weeks, Rommel launched several offensives on the El Alamein front, but he was met by reorganized Commonwealth forces that were reinforced by continual supplies and fresh divisions arriving from Alexandria.

August – September 1942

Churchill personally replaced Auchinleck as Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East with General Sir Harold Alexander, while General Montgomery took over the important command of the 8th Army in the Western Desert. Three hundred powerful new Sherman tanks were arrayed in British tank regiments.

On the Axis side, welcome new troops were employed, including trained paratroop formations like *Folgore* and *Ramcke*. All the brave attacks of the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions (supported by the Italian *Ariete, Littorio* and *Trieste* Divisions) in the Alam Halfa offensive failed, causing heavy losses amongst men and vehicles. Montgomery was able to field the 9th Australian, 2nd New Zealand, 1st South African, 51st (Highland) and 4th Indian Divisions (XXX Corps). In addition he had the 1st, 8th and 10th Armoured Divisions (X Corps), 7th Armoured as well as 50th and 44th Divisions (XIII Corps). In other words, he was fielding some of the best of the British Empire's troops.

October – November 1942

The major battle of El Alamein began with 104,000 Axis personnel, 489 tanks and 1,290 guns facing the attacking Commonwealth force that comprised over 200,000 men, 1,029 tanks and 2,311 guns. This was perhaps the most important clash of the entire North African campaign (Operations "Lightfoot" and "Supercharge"). Rommel had, in fact, just 38 *Panzerkampfwagen* IV tanks (the remainder of his German tanks were Panzer II and III tanks, and Marder III self-propelled guns armed with captured Russian 76.2mm guns). His "Deutsch-italienische *Panzerarmee", as it was renamed in September,* included the DAK and when Rommel returned to Germany ill was briefly led by *Generalleutnant* Stumme.

Its forces were as follows:

- 15th Panzer Division (*Generalleutnant* von Vaerst) with 8th Panzer Regiment, 115th Panzergrenadier Regiment, 33rd Artillery Regiment, 33rd Reconnaissance Battalion, and 33rd *Panzerjäger* Battalion the major units.
- 164th *leichte* Division (*Generalmajor* Lungershausen) with the 125th, 382nd and 433rd Panzergrenadier Regiments the major units.
- 90th *leichte* Division (*Generalleutnant* Graf von Sponeck) with the 155th, 200th, and the 361st Motorized Regiments, plus the 288th *Sonderverband* as the major units.
- 21st Panzer Division (*Generalleutnant* von Randow) with the 5th Panzer Regiment and the 104th Panzergrenadier Regiment the major units.
- *Fallschirmjäger* Brigade Ramcke, known as *Ramcke* after its commander, which was composed of the 4th Fallschirmjäger Regiment, II Paratroop Battalion, and one Anti-Tank Company.
- 136th *Giovani Fascisti* Division of *Generale* Di Nisio, which could array the *Giovani Fascisti* Regiment (Infantry), the 136th G.F. Artillery Regiment, and IX G.F. Infantry Battalion. To this division was attached the *Monferrato* Cavalry Group.
- X Army Corps, led by *Generale di Corpo d'Armata* Brunetti, was composed of the *Brescia* Division with its 19th and 20th Infantry Regiments, plus the 1st *Celere* Regiment. The *Pavia* Division (*Generale* Scattaglia) had the 27th and 28th Infantry Regiments, plus the 26th Artillery. The *Folgore* Paratroop Division (*Generale di Divisione* Frattini) was composed of the 186th and 187th Parachute Infantry Regiments, plus the 185th Artillery Regiment (*Folgore* also included engineers and sappers).
- 9th *Bersaglieri* Regiment, the 2nd Artillery Group, II Engineer Battalion, and XXXI *Guastatori* Battalion supported X Army Corps.

XX Army Corps commanded by *Generale di C.A.* De Stefanis, included:

- *Trieste* Motorized Division (*Generale* La Ferla), the 65th and 66th Motorized Regiments, plus the 21st Artillery. In addition there were the XI Medium Tank Battalion, VIII Armored *Bersaglieri* Battalion, and LII Motorized Engineer Battalion.
- *Generale* Arena led the *Ariete* Division, including the 132nd Armored Regiment, the 8th *Bersaglieri* Regiment, and the 132nd Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment.
- *Generale* Bitossi commanded the new *Littorio* Division. It had the 133rd Armored Regiment, the 12th *Bersaglieri* Regiment, the 133rd Armored Artillery Regiment, and the *Novara* Lancers Armored Group.

The Italian XXI Army Corps was under the command of acting *Generale di Divisione* Gloria comprising the 61st and 62nd Infantry Regiments. They were joined by the 46th Mechanized Artillery Regiment, plus IV Anti-Tank Grenadier Battalion composed of the *Trento* Division (*Generale* Masina). The *Bologna* Infantry Division had the 39th and 40th Infantry Regiments, along with the 205th Artillery Regiment. The 7th *Bersaglieri* Regiment was attached to this Army Corps.

Up-to-date and impressive P40 heavy tanks, and 90/53 and 105/25 self-propelled guns never reached Italian tank crews operating in North Africa. Such vehicles were needed to face the heavier Sherman and Grant tanks being operated by the Allies.

On 23 October, after a seemingly interminable and terrible artillery bombardment, a series of armored and infantry attacks attempted to penetrate Axis defensive lines. Fierce resistance from Axis forces obliged the surprised Montgomery to employ masses of U.S. manufactured tanks. After two weeks of exhausting fighting between the opposing forces, Rommel eventually ordered a retreat to Fuka with the few surviving vehicles of the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions, 164th and 90th *leichte* Divisions, and the *Ramcke* Brigade. Italian soldiers often fought to the last shot and even to death, destroying entire British armored columns. At night, the majority of *Ariete's* tanks burned on the El Alamein plain.

In the meantime, an Allied expeditionary force of 100,000 soldiers had landed in Morocco and Algeria ("Operation Torch") on 8 November 1942. With a new front opening in Tunisia, Rommel consolidated his remaining Axis forces in the Western Desert, but Montgomery marched up to Mersa Brega (December 1942).

1943 order of battle

The new *Heeresgruppe Afrika* (Army Group Africa) was not complete until March 1943. It comprised the 5th Panzer Army led by *General der Panzertruppen* von Vaerst, including: the 10th Panzer Division with 7th Panzer Regiment, the 69th and 86th Panzergrenadier Regiments, the 90th Artillery Regiment; and the 21st Panzer Division (*Oberst* Hildebrandt) with 5th Panzer Regiment, the 104th Panzergrenadier Regiment, and the 155th Artillery Regiment.

XXX Italian Corps of *Generale di C.A.* Sogno comprised the Assault/Landing *Superga* Division (*Generale* Gelich), the 50th Special Brigade of Brigadier General Imperiali, the 3rd Artillery Group, XV Medium Tank Battalion, and the 557th Self-propelled Gun Group with 47/32 and 75/18 *Semoventi*. Attached to them there were the 1st North Africa Legion of Blackshirts, plus X Blackshirts Assault Battalion. The remainder of *Bersaglieri*, *Carabinieri* and other troops were also included.

Oberst Weber led the 334th Infantry Division, including its French volunteers, the 756th Mountain Regiment (*Gebirgsjäger*), plus the 334th Artillery Regiment. The Hermann Göring Division, commanded by *Generalmajor* Schmidt, had the H.G. Panzer Regiment, the H.G. 1st and 2nd Panzergrenadier Regiments (both with *Sturmgeschütz* self-propelled guns), plus the H.G. Flak Regiment.

The "Division von Manteuffel" (under *Generalmajor* von Manteuffel) listed the 5th Parachute and *Barenthin* Regiments, the remnants of the *Ramcke* Brigade (Hübner Battalion), *Feld-Abteilung* T3 (Field Unit), *Marsch-Abteilung* A30 (March Unit), the 4th Artillery Regiment, and XI *Fallschirmjäger-Pionier-Bataillon* (Paratroop Engineers Battalion). The 999th *leichte* Division (*Oberst* Baade) was composed of the 961st and 962nd Motorized Infantry Regiments, plus the 999th Artillery Regiment, and the 20th Flak Division (3rd Flak Artillery Regiment).

The Army Group support incorporated some elite units: the Italian "*S.Marco*" Landing Regiment, the 501st and 504th Heavy Panzer Battalions (with new heavy Tiger I tanks), plus the 190th Recce Group. Attached to these support units there were some *Kampfgruppen* from ten exhausted units (for example, *Gruppe Schmid*, a company of the 7th Panzer Regiment, *Kampfgruppe Strempel*,, 334th Pioneer Battalion, and so on).

Generale d'Armata Messe would have command of the 1st Italian Army. It was composed of XX Army Corps (*Generale* Orlando), with the *Giovani Fascisti* Division (*Generale* Sozzani), the 8th *Bersaglieri* Regiment, the *Giovani Fascisti* Infantry Regiment, and the 136th Artillery Regiment. The *Trieste* Motorized Division still comprised the 65th and 66th Infantry Regiments, and the 21st Artillery Regiment (*Generale* La Ferla). The 90th *leichte* Division (*Generalleutnant* Graf von Sponeck) had the 155th, 200th and 361st Motorized Regiments and the 190th Artillery Regiment.

XXI Army Corps, led by *Generale* Berardi, listed the *La Spezia* "Landing" Division (*Generale* Pizzolato) with the 125th and 126th Infantry Regiments, plus the 80th Artillery Regiment. The *Pistoia* Division had the 35th and 36th Regiments commanded by *Generale* Fallusi, plus the 3rd Artillery Regiment. The 164th *leichte* Division of *Generalmajor* von Liebenstein comprised the 125th, 382nd and 433rd Panzergrenadier Regiments.

Generale di Divisione, Count Calvi di Bergolo led the newly arrived *Centauro* Armored Division with the 31st Tank Regiment, the 5th *Bersaglieri* Regiment, the 131st Artillery Regiment, the 132nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment, and the *Lodi* Cavalry Group (AB 40 armored cars). General Mannerini commanded the *Raggruppamento Sahariano,* or Saharan Group. It comprised the 290th and 350th Infantry Regiments, IV Infantry Battalion, seven Saharan Companies (equipped with *Viberti SPA* 42 vehicles), and the *Novara* Group with armored cars.

The survivors of the 15th Panzer Division included the 8th Panzer Regiment, the 115th Panzergrenadier Regiment, the 33rd Artillery Regiment; the 288th Afrika Panzergrenadier Regiment, and the Luftwaffe's *Jäger* Battalion. Finally, there were available the 19th and 20th Flak Divisions with three detached groups and the 3rd Anti-Tank (*Pak*) Regiment. Army support consisted of seven Italian Artillery Groups, the *Monferrato* and *Nizza* Armored Car Groups, the 3rd German Recce Group, and CLXXI and XXVI Italian Machine Gun Battalions.

January 1943

By this time, Rommel had command of just the "phantoms" of his *Heeresgruppe Afrika*. With his new Tiger I heavy tanks, he organized his army on the Mareth Line. Rommel launched his last epic offensive against the U.S. 1st Armored Division, the famous "Old Ironsides". The inexperienced American tank crews were not prepared for North African warfare, and were greatly surprised by their aggressive Italian and German veteran opponents!

February 1943

Montgomery cautiously advanced against the Mareth Line, but before he could launch an offensive, *Generaloberst* von Arnim (Commander of 5th Panzer Army) and Rommel himself attacked the U.S. II Corps with the new *Spezia* and *Pistoia* Divisions, plus the *Giovani Fascisti* and *Centauro* Divisions, which were collectively renamed as the Italian 1st Army (commanded by General Messe). Although these combined forces inflicted 7,000 casualties upon their opponents in U.S. II Corps, General Patton slowed and reversed their offensive with his Allied reserves.

March 1943

Italian regiments, alongside the 90th and 164th *leichte* Divisions, fought hard against the Allied 8th Army still at the Mareth Line. But lacking consistent artillery support, they were finally overwhelmed by the 2nd New Zealand Division. The ailing *Feldmarschall* Rommel was forced to leave Africa, whilst von Arnim took over command. General Messe was the sole Italian general with DAK troops under his control.

The 8th Army counterattacked against the *Pistoia*, *Trieste*, *Spezia* and *Giovani Fascisti* Divisions. The result was that by late March 1943, the flimsy Axis force was definitively destroyed.

April 1943

The last remnants of the Italian Army in Africa retreated to Wadi Akarit and Enfidaville, but they were surrounded by mobile Allied forces in the southeast of Tunisia.

May 1943

The main cities of Bizerte and Tunis were conquered by the 8th Army and U.S. II Corps, with a total of 250,000 prisoners. Only a few Italian and German fugitives left the African coast to retreat to Sicily. This marked the very end of the Axis occupation of North Africa.

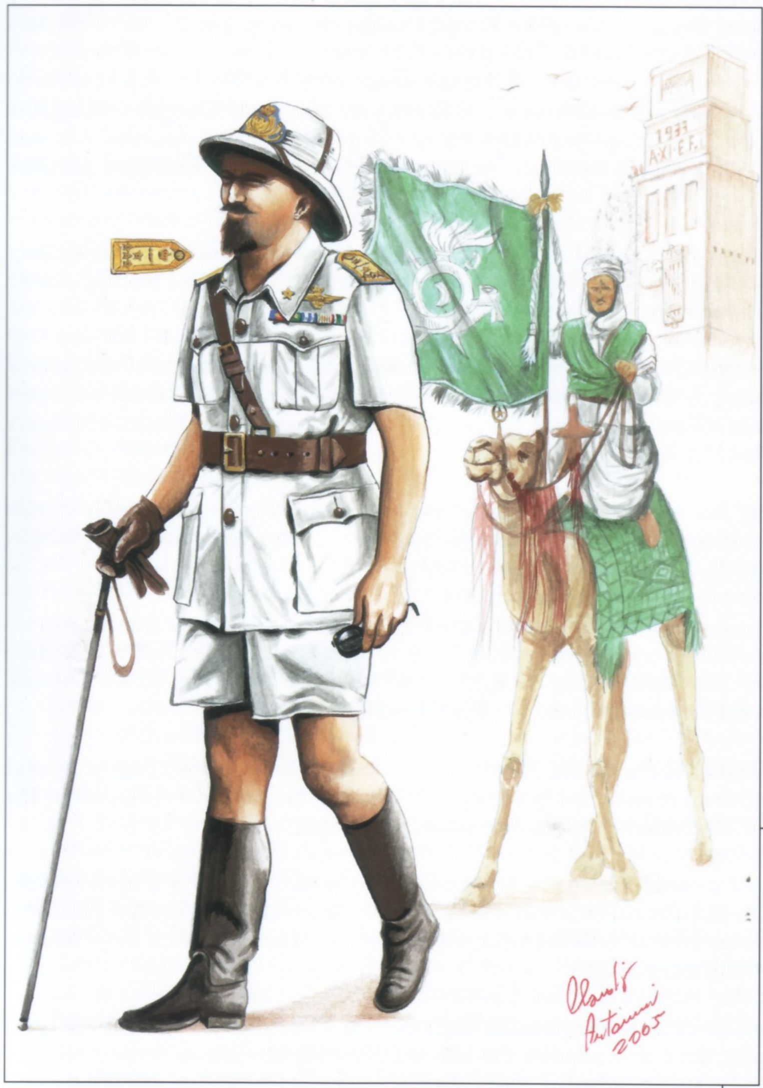


PLATE A1. Air Marshal (*Maresciallo dell'Aria*) Italo Balbo, Castel Benito, 1940

Air Marshal Balbo was one of the best known figures of Fascism. A skillful pilot of Atlantic flights in the 1930s, he later became the dynamic governor of Libya. Unfortunately, Balbo was shot down in his aircraft by friendly Italian fire in June 1940. Perhaps under his expert command, the fate of the Italian Army in North Africa could have been a better one.

Balbo wears the elegant dress uniform of the Italian Royal Air Force (*Regia Aeronautica*). The officer's colonial helmet is of the "Aden" pattern, with a false chinstrap and *puggaree*. On the front is sewn the badge of an Air Marshal. Balbo also wears the most popular colonial garment, a *sahariana* (bush jacket), with its peculiar breast pockets (see also plates A2 and F3). The buttons were usually made of wood, bakelite or fruit stone. Regulations of the Italian Africa Ministry prescribed marching dress with shorts and boots for officers, but "just on the African lowlands", or *bassopiano*. On his left breast, Balbo displays many ribbons and a pilot's eagle. Meanwhile, his rigid shoulder boards of *Maresciallo dell'Aria* are made of rich gold lace with rank stars (see inset).

Note the eccentric Balbo's affectation for sunglasses, gloves and a walking stick. Visible in the background is the standard-bearer of the 2nd Libyan Battalion "*Tripolitania*", of the Camel Troops (*meharisti*).

PLATE A2. PAI motorcyclist, Lance-Sergeant (*guardia scelta*), Libya, 1940-41

The *Polizia dell'Africa Italiana* or *PAI* (Italian Africa Police) was a handpicked corps within the Italian colonies. At the outbreak of the war, the *PAI* performed as military police, supporting the civilian population as well as fighting with honor. Several units had motorcycle and armored sections (see Plate B2). Native African *PAI* troops also existed.

The *PAI* was armed entirely with the special Beretta 38A submachine gun with integral folding bayonet. This figure wears the standard *sahariana* with brass fasces on the collar. Italian khaki uniforms were of a mustard color, a little different to the DAK olive green shade or British khaki drill. The mid-blue aiguillette was a service device common to all *PAI* personnel. Characteristic rank chevrons are displayed on both sleeves. The M36 crash helmet appears similar to the tank version (see Plates B2 and B3), and it shows the *PAI* badge on the front - the *Savoia* eagle, with shield and knot. This crash helmet leaves the ears uncovered for better hearing.

Our guardsman wears the peculiar Italian field cap nicknamed *bustina*, of a pattern exclusive to all *PAI* personnel. It lacks side flaps and a cloth visor, but it has a left patch bearing smaller chevrons (see also Plate B3). A leather coat red-brown in color – somewhat similar to the tank model - was also issued (see Plate B3). The distinctive *PAI* equipment included the special haversack and motorcyclist leggings. The motorcycle depicted is a Motoguzzi V500 *Alce* (Elk).

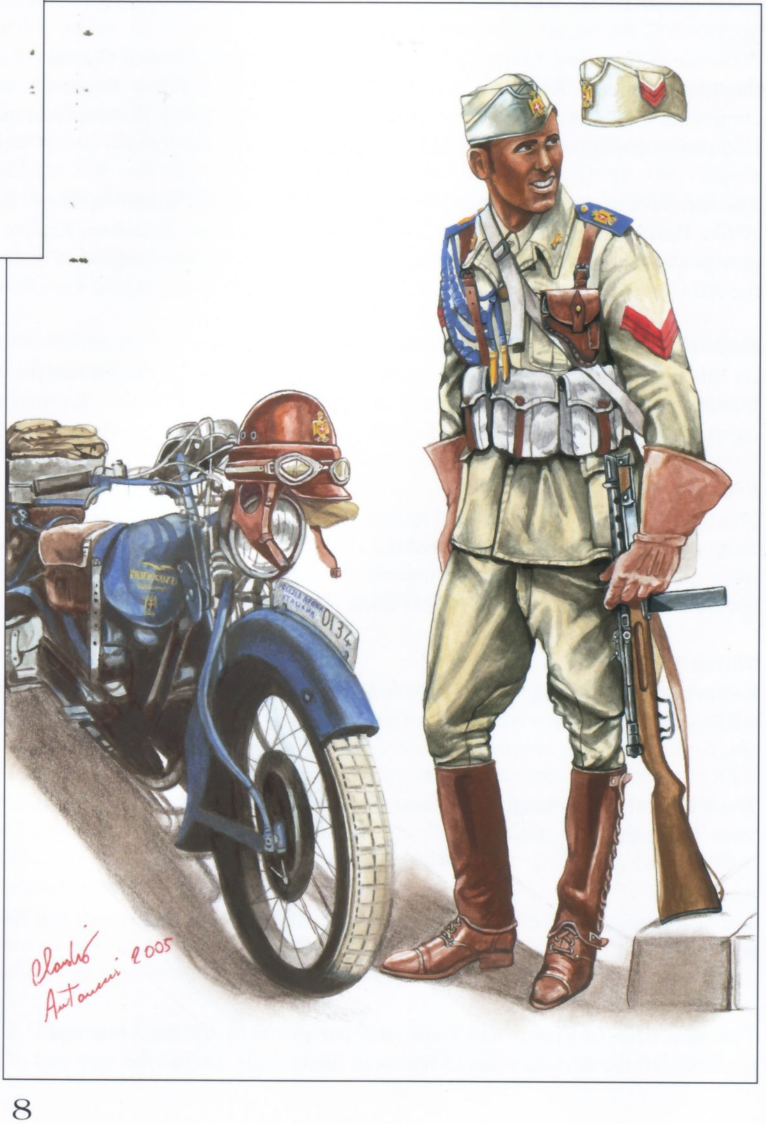


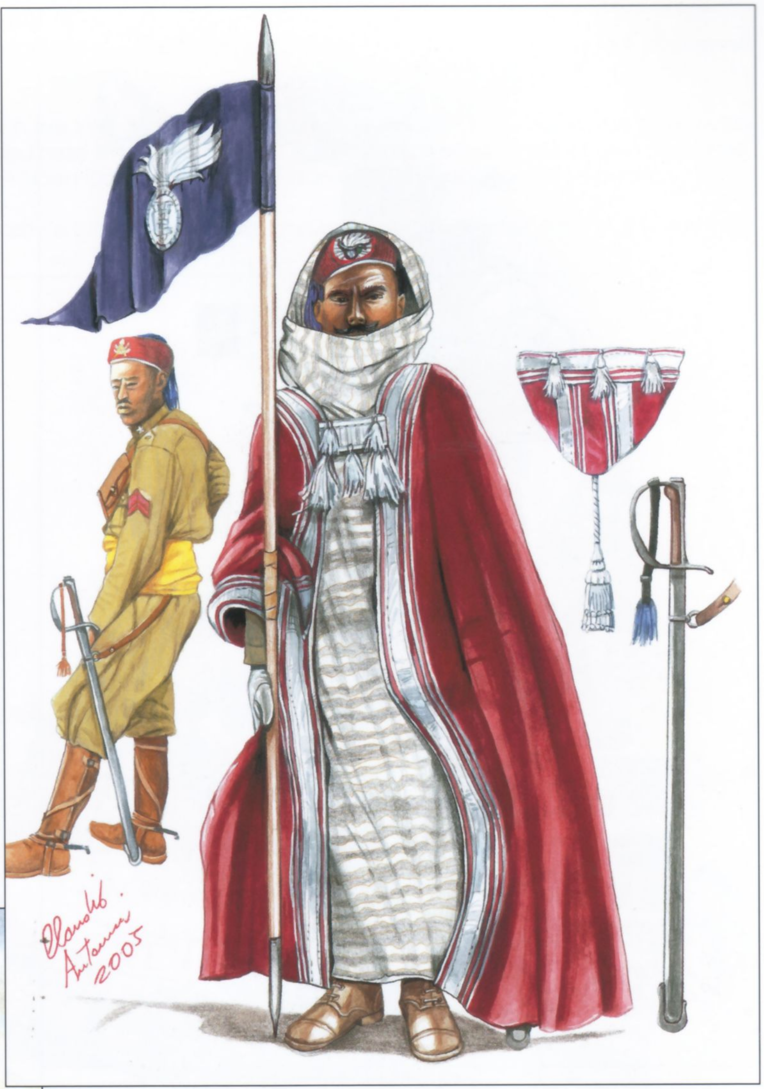
PLATE A3. Libyan *Carabiniere*, (*Zaptiè*), Escort for the Governor, Castel Benito, 1940

In early 1940, Italian colonial troops dressed in gaudy uniforms, possibly reflecting the exotic nature of Africa, rather than being suited to modern warfare. Very soon the threat of a new desert war dramatically gave place to more practical dull uniforms (see Plates E2 and E3).

The *Zaptiè* were the native Libyan *carabinieri,* and some of them escorted the governor. Illustrated here is a soldier in full Arabian style dress, comprising a white robe or *barracano,* and a "garnet red" cape, or *burnus.* This latter is embroidered in silver. All Libyan troops wore the "garnet red" headgear called *tachia* with an under-*tachia* in white cotton; on the front of the *tachia* there is the silver grenade motif of the *carabinieri.* Around the headgear is draped a white scarf.

The armament of the *zaptiè* included the cavalry saber Mod. 71 and the cavalry lance Mod. 900. A dark blue banner, or *fiamma,* on the lance bears the white *carabinieri* badge. In the insets we can see the rear view of the hood and the cavalry saber Mod. 71.

A letter written by Rommel in March 1941 recalls a gift of an Arab *burnus* cape for his wife, from the Italian General Calvi di Bergolo. The officer's *burnus* was dark blue with red silk decorations! In the background there is a Libyan cavalryman, or *savari.*



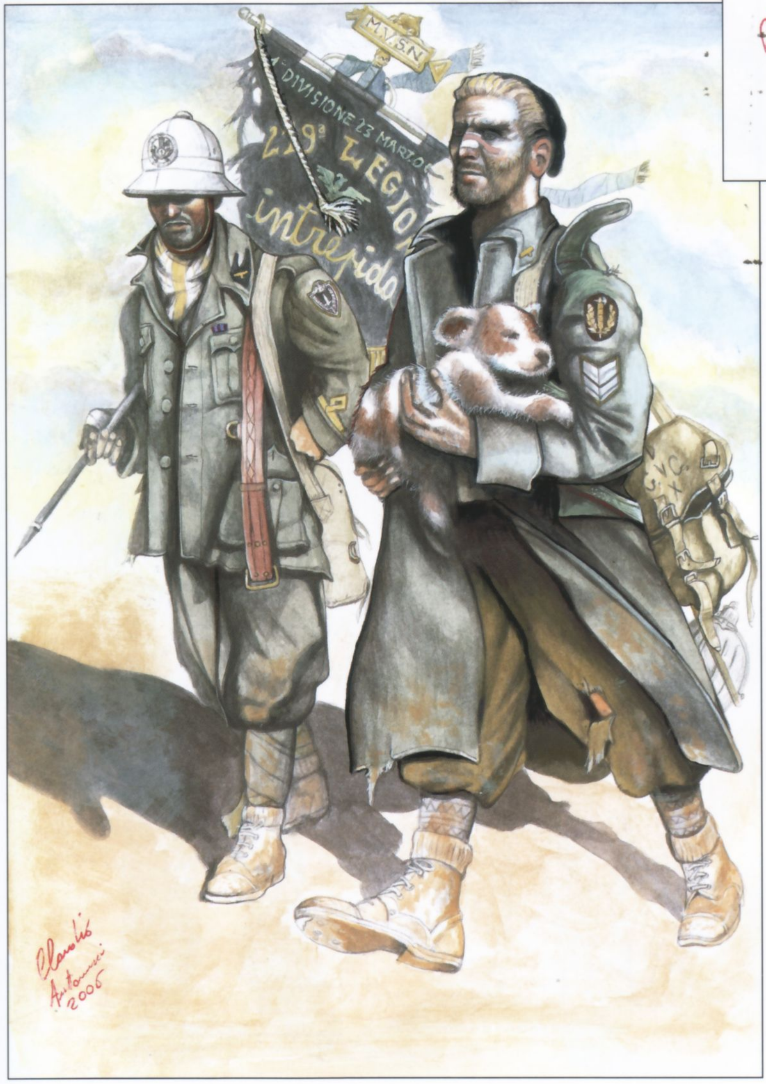


PLATE A4. Standard-Bearer (*Alfiere*), and NCO (*I Caposquadra*) 1st Division "*23 Marzo*" *Libica* (Libyan), *Intrepida* (Intrepid), Bardia, January 1941

This plate is taken directly from a contemporary photo, and demonstrates the appearance of some Blackshirts during the volatile days of late 1940 - early 1941.

Both figures are going into captivity after a week of hard fighting, but have managed to save their puppy. They wear a motley range of colonial and gray-green garments. The sun topee of the standard-bearer (of "other ranks" pattern) has the stenciled badge of the 219th Legion on the front. The banner, or *labaro,* bears the honorific title of *Intrepida* given by Mussolini to this Blackshirt division.

The *fez* of the squad leader has lost its tassel (see Plate E1). He has the *Arditi* Assault Troop badge on the sleeve, dating back to WWI. Note the metallic shield of the division pinned on the standard-bearer's tunic. He has the rank of *sottocapo manipolo* (2nd Maniple Leader, roughly equivalent to 2nd Lieutenant). The Fascist banner, which formerly fluttered on the walls of Sidi Barrani, fell into captivity at the same time as its owners.

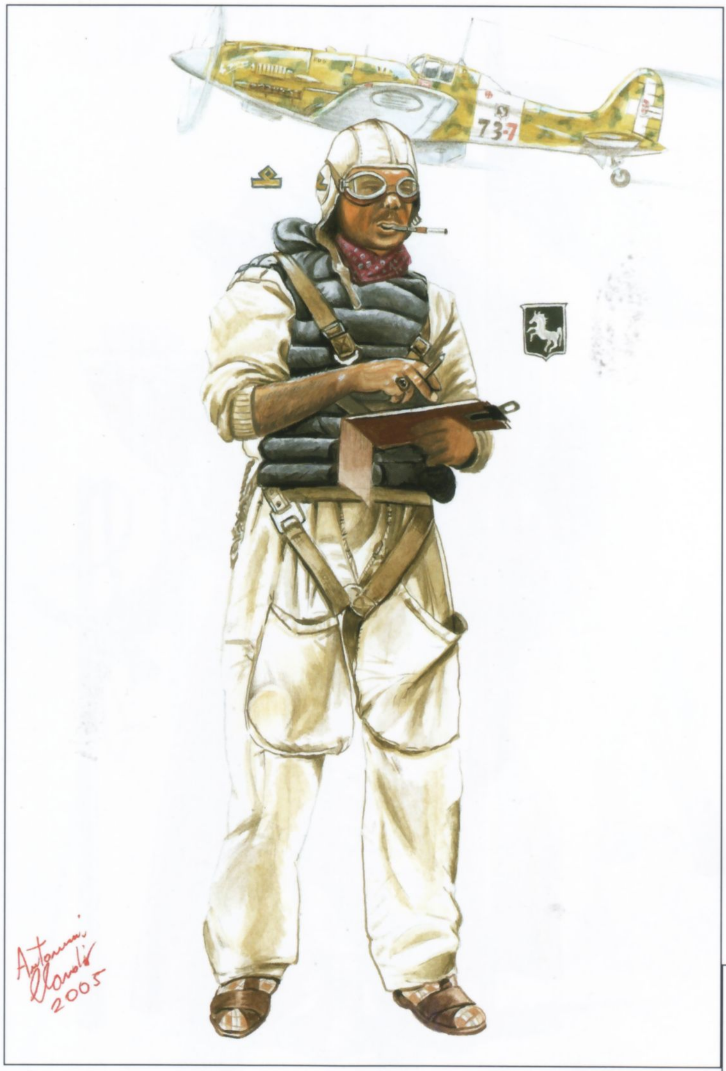


PLATE B1. 2nd Lieutenant Pilot (*Sottotenente Pilota*), 4th Flight *Francesco Baracca*, Libya, 1941

The 4th Flight, or *Stormo*, of Italian fighters was part of the 73rd Squadron, 9th Group. It operated in North Africa from November 1941 to January 1943, participating in the defense of the port of Tripoli. The fighters of the 4th Flight also put up resistance with some success against the Desert Air Force during the advance up to El Alamein, as well as supporting the Axis retreat to Tunisia in 1943.

The *Regia Aeronautica* (Italian Air Force) adapted its flight garb to the hot climate, just as its comrades in the Luftwaffe did (see Plate L3). Thus, a characteristic informal combination of winter and summer flying suits was worn. All the garments were introduced in the 1930s.

There were three types of flying helmet - one made of brown leather, a brown canvas version, and a white canvas version (this is the type illustrated here. Note also in the left inset the 2nd Lieutenant rank badge). Caps with visors and *bustine* were just as commonly used. A two-piece flying suit was available, it being made of waterproof wool. A second version of lighter brown canvas was also worn, but both types had sheepskin collars and modern zippers. Khaki shirts and shorts were also worn aboard the airplane. The thigh pockets were rather suitable inside the cockpit; they could even contain meal tins!

Special flying slippers without soles were available, although even sandals could be worn. Following the native habit, Italians wore sandals more widely than the German and Commonwealth forces. The particular pattern illustrated here protected the wearer's toes very well. Note the IF 41 parachute harness. A kind of lifejacket is illustrated here – made of canvas in a "sausage shape" and filled with *kapok* (compare to Plate L3). The fighter in the background is a *Macchi* 202 *Folgore*; it bears the insignia of the 4th Flight with the "Rampant Lille Horse". Such insignia was sometimes applied on the left breast of the flying suit (see right inset). This was the personal device of Major Francesco Baracca, the Italian ace of WW1. Today this logo is still used by the Ferrari racing team!

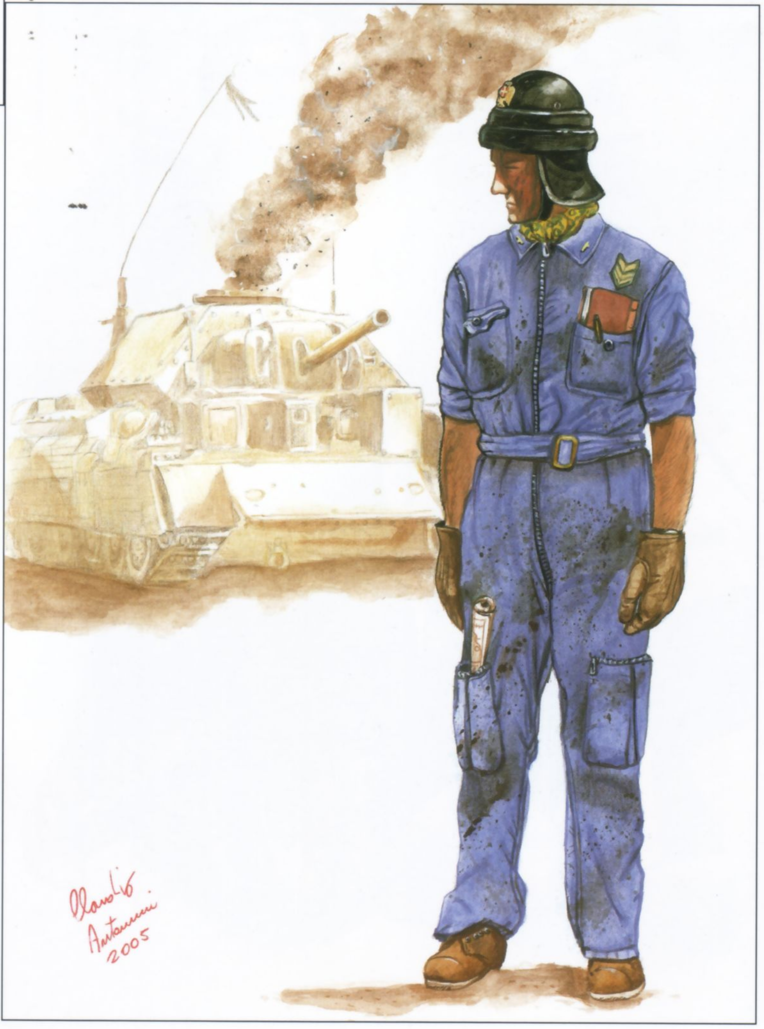


PLATE B2. Sergeant-Major (*Brigadiere*), Italian Africa Police (*Polizia dell'Africa Italiana*), "*R.Gessi*" Battalion, 1941

The *Polizia dell'Africa Italiana* served in North Africa with armored formations equipped with L3 light tanks and armored cars (AB 40 and AB 41).

Note the comfortable M1941 blue overalls used inside the vehicle. On the breast were stitched the *brigadiere* chevrons. The scarf was essential to protect crewmen from the smoke of the main gun and the dust thrown up by the tank. The gloves were suitable both for the driver and the loader.

PLATE B3. Captain (*Capitano*), *Ariete* Armored Division, 1941-42

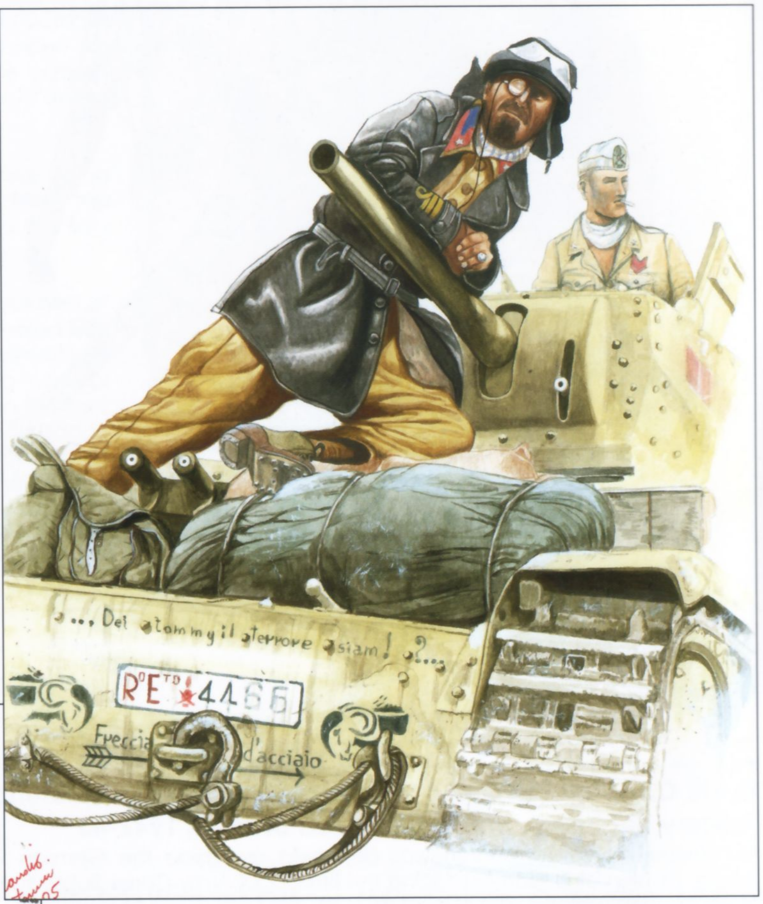
The *Ariete* "Ram" Division was, together with the *Littorio* Division, the most famous Italian armored formation in North Africa, and it performed three years of service in the desert war without relief.

The author is personally familiar with an authentic M13/40 tank, stored in the Infantry Museum in Rome. Space inside the hull of the tank is very cramped and hot (over 45°C!). In fact, Italian military regulations enrolled men who were just 1.50 – 1.54m tall to serve as tank crews. Therefore, considering the conditions these crewmen served in during the North African Campaign, these Italian crewmen appear rather heroic.

Armored troops were entirely equipped with a special but outdated garb - a black leather coat and an M35 crash helmet, though this was later made of leather lined with felt and cardboard. Often the side cap or *bustina* was worn as a substitute (see the background figure). The most popular pattern of *bustina* in Africa was the Mod. 29 "*Aeronautica*" (without flaps). In Tunisia, Italian self-propelled gun crews adopted steel helmets too. All Italian personnel in North Africa were issued with sun goggles with neutral or amber colored lenses. According to regulations, these goggles were placed on the left side of the headgear, thus exposing the front badge (Plates A2, D2 and G1). But following the style of Rommel, many men preferred British plexiglass goggles (Plate L1).

The captain pictured here wears *Afrika-Korps* boots. Note the lace showing rank on his coat cuffs. In the desert there was even a shortage of collar patches (the Special Store of Tripoli lacked 300,000 pairs of *mostrine* - collar patches). Therefore, the men had handmade collar patches in many different shapes.

The illustration shows an M13/40 tank of the *Ariete* Division laden with sandbags and rucksacks. Sections of tracks were also placed on the frontal armor for extra protection. Note the front plate as prescribed for every Italian vehicle. It is also interesting to see the two ram (*Ariete*) emblems painted on the frontal armor, plus the motto, "We are the terror of the Tommies!" There is also a nickname on the tank - "Steel Arrow". Caccia Dominioni remembers a captain of the Italian armored regiments who dressed pretentiously, even wearing a monocle, as depicted here!



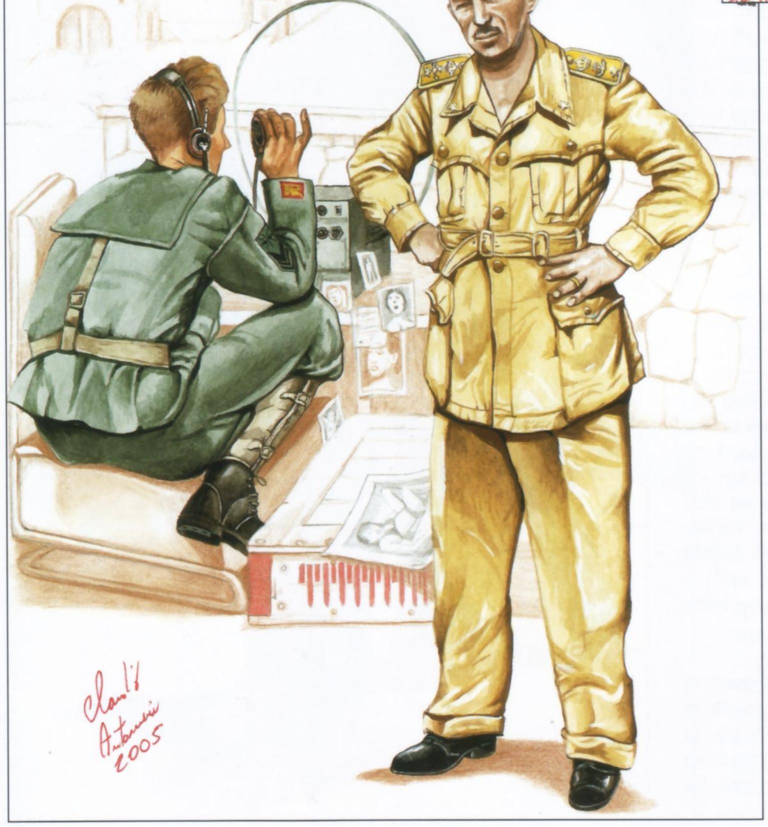


PLATE C1. Admiral (*Ammiraglio*) Giartosio, Flotilla Group A/1 (*Gruppo Flottiglie A/1*), Mersa Matruh, 1942

In the 1930s the Royal Italian Navy adopted functional lightweight garments for colonial service. Here Admiral Giartosio is dressed with a simple *sahariana* with just the gold rank shoulder boards. His cap in khaki cloth bears the *Regia Marina* badge and the braids of an admiral, or *greca*.

The radio operator on the left operating a *Radiomarelli* RF1 radio wears the gray-green version of the landing troops' uniform. This *S.Marco* radio operator displays his trade badge and rank of *sottocapo* (leading rating) on both sleeves. The cuffs are marked with the traditional *S.Marco* lion. Our radio operator has personalized his position with Italian pinups!

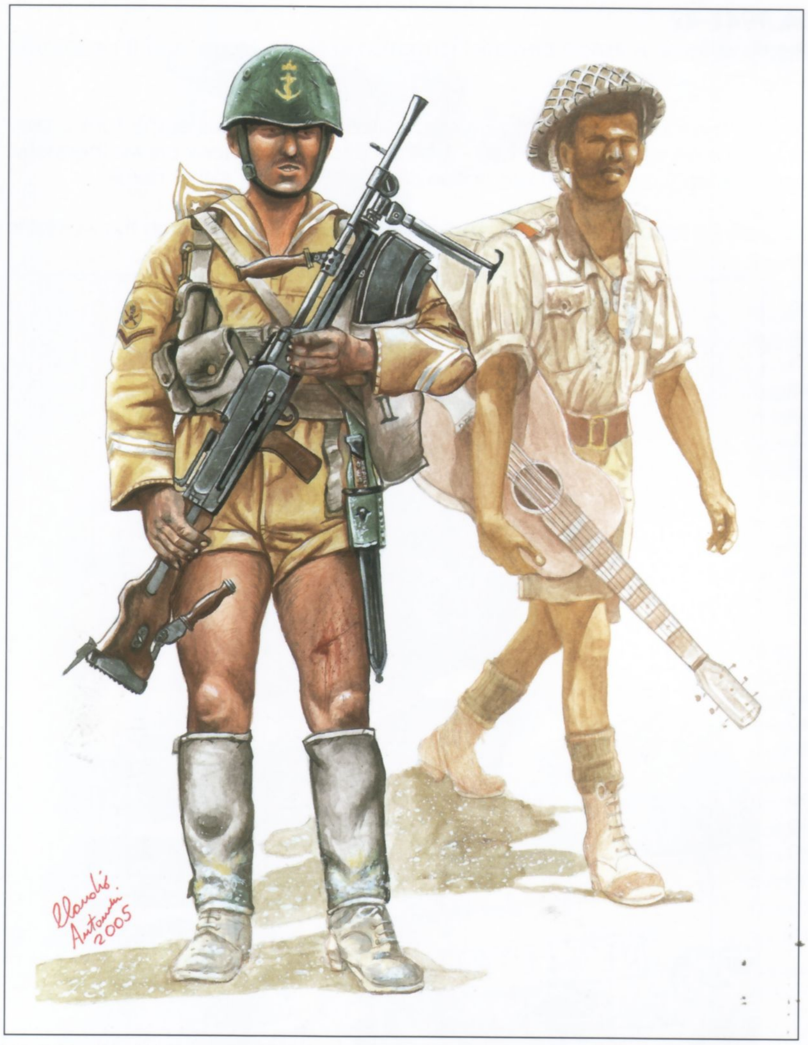


PLATE C3. Warrant Officer (*Maresciallo Capo*), 21st Motorized Artillery Regiment, *Trieste* Motorized Division, 1942-43

The *Trieste* Motorized Division was deployed alongside the German 90th *leichte* Division at El Alamein, facing the British XXX Army Corps. Subsequently in the Tunisian campaign, it played an important role in the Mareth Line.

Such a shabby appearance among Italian soldiers in the desert might be questioned by some readers, but this is based on original evidence. The Warrant Officer depicted in this plate has his own M933 helmet covered with an uneven coat of sand paint originating from vehicle or aircraft workshops. The uncovered front part of the gray-green helmet in the figure shows the black badge of the 21st Motorized Artillery Regiment. However, the term "motorized" at this date should be viewed as being largely theoretical.

Certainly, self-propelled guns of the 75/18 model were employed, but the *Trieste* Motorized Division depended heavily on captured Commonwealth vehicles. Even the guns came from captured booty of Tobruk, such as the illustrated Bofors 40mm gun placed in an anti-aircraft position.

The *Maresciallo* or Warrant Officer in this plate wears Commonwealth khaki drill shirt and shorts, the latter having been rolled up for comfort! The collar patches were rarely worn on the shirt (see Plate G4). The rank bars of *Maresciallo Capo* are sported on the left breast, while the trade badge of tank destroyer (*distruttore di carri*) is affixed to the upper left sleeve; the number "2" in the center indicates the number of destroyed enemy tanks. Commonwealth "hose tops" and highly regarded "chukka" desert boots complete the garb of this Warrant Officer, who is armed as a gunner with a 9mm Beretta pistol. The lanyard around the neck was secured to the pistol, preventing its loss in combat.

Italian gunners would be supplied with special asbestos mittens for changing hot machine gun barrels, although our figure protects his right hand with a more common glove. The 8mm Breda M1937 machine gun was quite a powerful weapon, although its modern load system was faulty. The brass dog tag was seldom worn by Italian soldiers since they considered them unlucky objects!

PLATE C2. Leading Rating (*Marò Scelto*), III Tobruk Battalion, Tobruk Garrison, 1942

The III Battalion of the *S.Marco* Landing Regiment was honored with the "Tobruk" title, after the eventual conquest of the Libyan town in June 1942. This battalion was tough opponent for the South Africans, and the Landing Regiment gained a good reputation in combat with its evident Fascist creed (see the background of the figure).

The M933 helmet was the standard naval issue item with a painted anchor. Some snapshots show a group of Marines of the Tobruk Battalion wearing a Hessian cover on their helmets (Plate H2). Khaki berets or colonial helmets were also worn. The field jumper, or *camisaccio,* existed in a white version too. It bears a single rank chevron in black for tropical use, and the trade badge of an armorer (*armiere*).

Webbing equipment was adopted during WWI, initially produced by a British company. Note the canvas gaiters (see also Plate D1). Some photographs attest how Italian Marines at Tobruk wore olive green shirts, sandals and paratroop jump boots; perhaps these latter were used by the swimmer-parachutist company. Sports sneakers were also worn (Plate G3). In one such photograph, a single Marine is observed equipped with the field waistcoat, or *samurai,* of Plate G3.

The standard M91 bayonet was carried in a leather sheath, but a special naval dagger was adopted by Italian landing troops. It appeared rather similar to the Blackshirts pattern (see Plate E4). Our Leading Rating is armed with a useful Brno-Enfield MKI light machine gun. Its spare magazines are carried in the Mod. T35 gasmask bag.

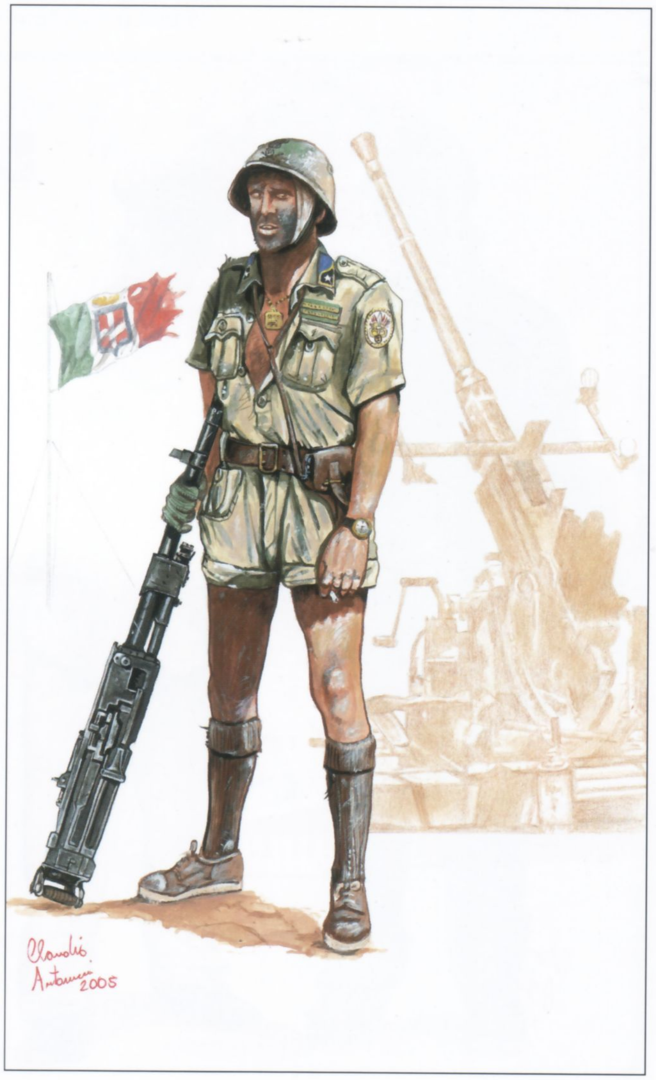


PLATE D1. *Bersagliere*, 7th Regiment, *Trento* Motorized Division, 1941-42

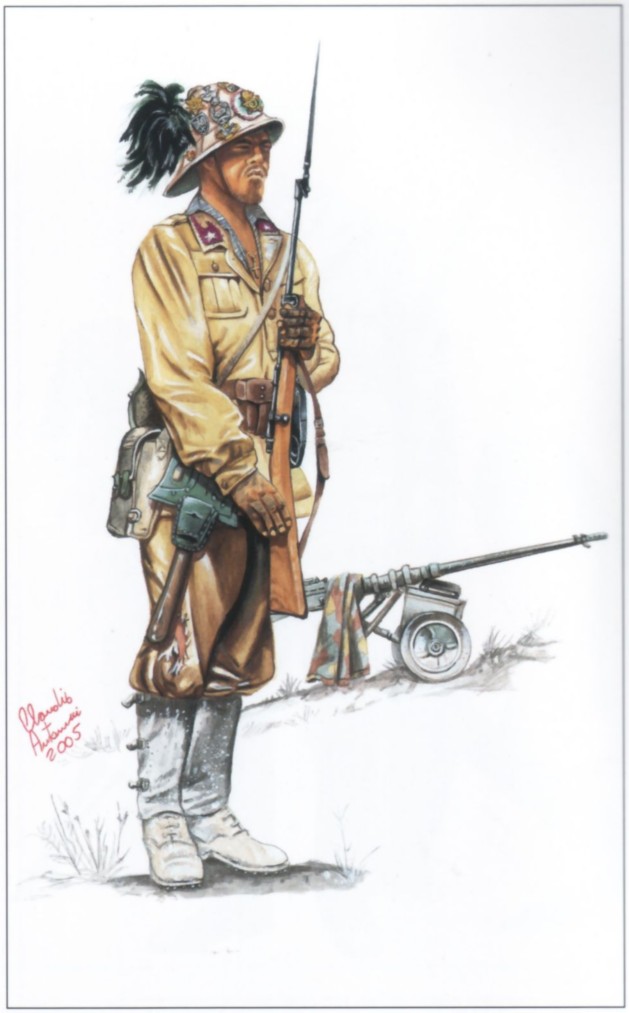
The *Bersaglieri* were the most famous rifle troops of the Italian Army. Rommel commented on their valor, saying, "Here in North Africa, the Italian *Bersagliere* has aroused the German soldier's admiration!"

We can see in the illustration the popular pullover shirt Mod. 39, or *camiciotto sahariano*. Examination of some authentic garments reveals a cheap cotton composition. In his diary written in North Africa, Captain H.P. Samwell of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Regiment noted the first time he encountered Italian soldiers with their badly tailored uniforms and their filthiness (October 1942). A second version of the *camiciotto sahariano* was completely open like the *sahariana* (see Plate E1). On the collar, the *Bersaglieri* wore the crimson patches or *fiamme*, while the silver stars were the ubiquitous symbol of Italian soldiers.

The ammunition pouches were also characteristic of the *Bersaglieri*, being made of brown leather and with no collar strap (see Plate E1). Note the widespread use of civilian shirts. The bayonet was often attached to the field shovel.

For the Ethiopian Campaign of 1935-36, Italy issued the M1935 colonial helmet (*casco coloniale*). This latter was of obsolete design, made of cork covered with "*Massaua*" type twill. A *Folgore* veteran remembers that his "colonial helmet was hard and heavy, whilst the English tropical helmet was very light, being made of banana leaves" (Plate G1). Usually the Italian colonial helmet bore on the front a brass national cockade and branch badge, or sometimes a black badge embroidered on a gray-green background was also worn. This branch badge could be drawn by hand, or be absent altogether (see Plate E1). A small pocket on the right side of the colonial helmet (just under the vent) held in place the distinctive cockerel feathers of the *Bersaglieri* (*piumetto*). Curiously, on their colonial helmets, troopers were known to fix German and Commonwealth trophies such as an RAF crown, a German eagle shield, or badges of the Coldstream Guards, Royal Tank Regiment, 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, or Durham Light Infantry.

The issue musket or *moschetto* for light troops of the *Bersaglieri* was the M1891/38 with folding bayonet, in a caliber of 7.35mm.



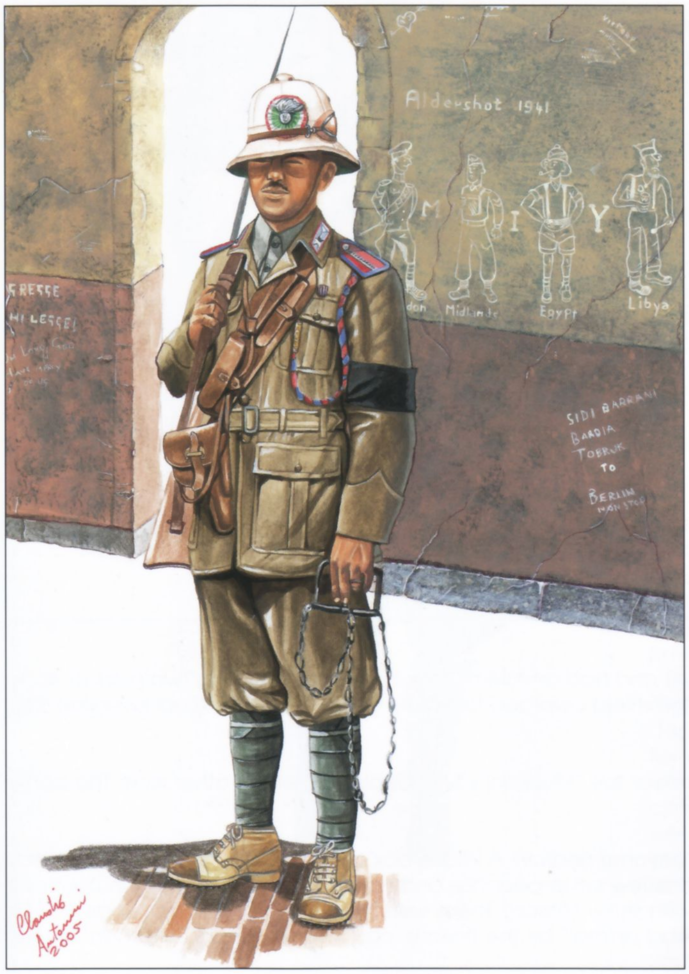


PLATE D2. Warrant Officer (*Maresciallo Ordinario*), Military Police (*Carabinieri*), Tobruk, 1941

Italy assigned police duties in its African colonies to the *PAI* and *Carabinieri* - the well-known Italian military police. A former officer of the British Special Air Service told how he was captured by the *Carabinieri* in Libya in 1941, beaten up and even handcuffed. The *Carabinieri* also had their combat sections and a battalion of *Carabinieri*-paratroopers who fought with some bravery in December 1941 at Elvet El Asel (Libya).

The Warrant Officer, or *maresciallo ordinario*, in this plate has the regular olive-khaki attire of the Italian soldier in the colonies. As usual the sun helmet looks rather faded and it bears the cockade and flaming grenade of the *Carabinieri* on the front. The gray-green shirt and puttees (*fasce gambiere*) are used because of a shortage of khaki garments. The colonial tunic of the figure is completed with special *Carabinieri* collar tabs, or *alamari*, whilst the rigid shoulder boards with the *maresciallo*'s rank lace are characteristic of *Carabinieri* colonial dress. Black shoulder boards were also observed. Note the aiguillettes of the colonial service (*cordone d'anzianità coloniale*). The breast ribbon is for the Ethiopian Campaign medal.

The brown leather bandoleer includes two pockets (Mod. 91) and was standard for artillery, mounted troops and tank crews. There also existed a gray-green version. The lanyard of the *Glisenti* 1889 pistol was secured to the bandoleer. The M1912 boots for foot soldiers had a special hobnail pattern on the sole. The M91/38 musket with foldable bayonet was normal issue for all *Carabinieri*. Note the black brassard on the left sleeve to denote family mourning. Interestingly there was an episode during the battle of El Alamein when an Italian soldier wearing such a mourning brassard was captured by Commonwealth troops and believed to be a fascist. We can see graffiti in the background of the illustration, left by British soldiers on a wall in Tobruk.

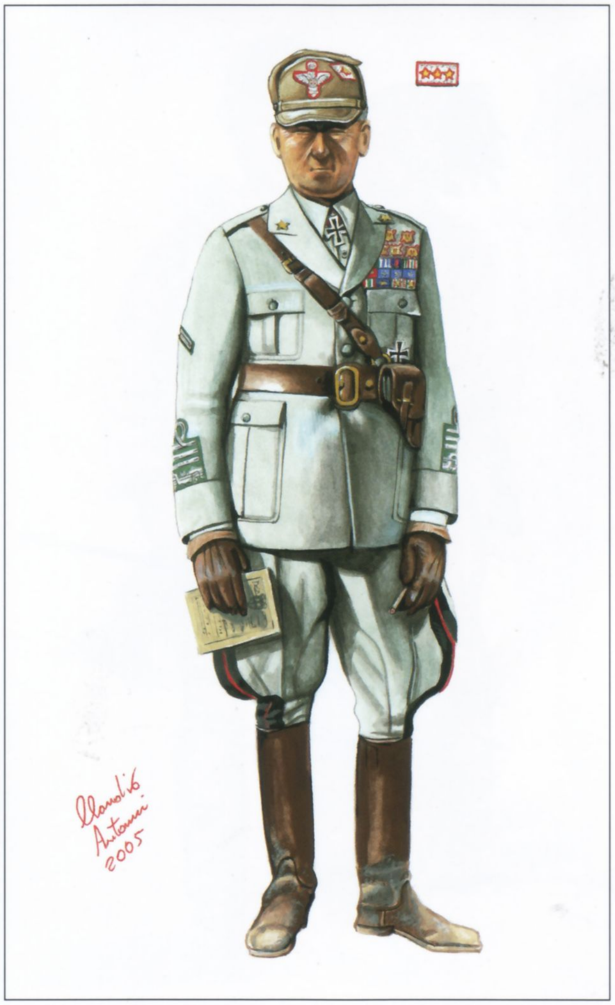
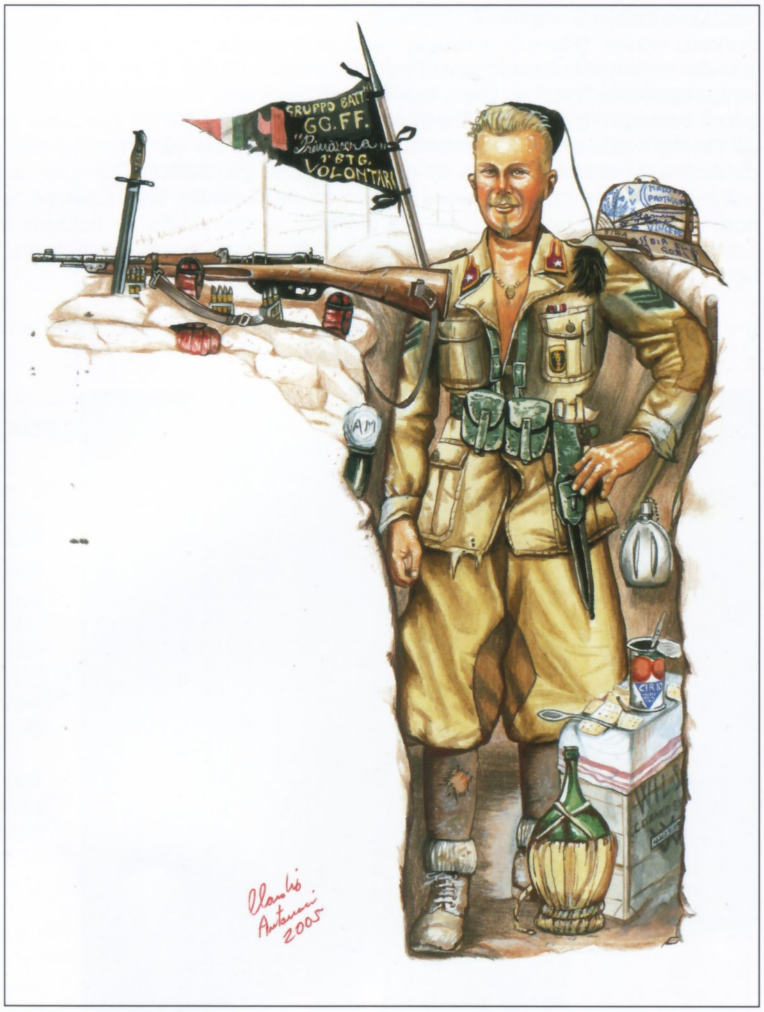


PLATE D3. Army General (*Generale d'Armata*) Messe, Tunisia, 1943

Messe was the best Italian general of World War 2. As a soldier with long experience, he was the sole Italian commander who led German troops. The colonial *bustina* Mod. 42 with visor and chinstrap bears the rank badge of Army General, as shown in the inset.

The elegant outfit of this commander – introduced in 1940 – is in privately made *cordellino* cloth. The breeches had internal reinforcements and side bands in velvet. The high cavalry boots, here in the brown colonial version, have just been greased. One veteran recalls some military doctors in the El Alamein Line wearing shiny boots and even spurs! (See Plate E4).

The size of rank badges on the cuffs also varied; their pattern was called *greca*. Wartime rank badges were smaller and embroidered in rayon yarn. The impressive array of General Messe's war decorations is as follows: on the right sleeve are two wounds in service; on the throat is the German Knight's Cross awarded in Russia; on the lower left breast there is the German Iron Cross 1st Class; the upper left breast is full of five gold war promotions. The ribbons are explained as follows: first row, from left to right - Saint *Maurizio* and *Lazzaro* Order; War Merit Cross; *Savoia* Military Order (Knight); Memorial National Medal of WWI. In the second row - Merit Medal for volunteers in WWI; Medal of the Ethiopian War; and two WWI war medals with golden swords.


GRUPPO BATT. GG.FF. "Primavera" 1° BTG. VOLONTARI
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Claudio Antonini 2005

PLATE E1. Lance-Sergeant (*Caporal Maggiore*), *Giovani Fascisti* Regiment (Young Fascist), 1941-43

Although composed of young boys 17-20 years old, the Young Fascists Regiment, at first named *Gruppo Battaglioni GG.FF.* (Young Fascist Battalion Group) was certainly one of the most pugnacious units of the Italian Army in Africa. On 29 August 1942, the Corps was renamed Young Fascist Division, grouping the 136th Artillery Regiment, medical sections n. 15 and 16, plus the Desert Range Squads. Its glorious end came on 13 May 1943 when it was ordered by the Italian-German High Command to destroy its ammunition and armaments while the flags of II and III Battalions were buried. I Battalion divided its own flag into seventeen parts, which were then given to each of the survivors.

Although rather misjudged by the Italian High Command, the Young Fascists firmly asked Mussolini permission to fight against the enemies of Fascism. At Bir El Gobi these young boys fought with bravery and impressed Commonwealth veterans, who nicknamed the *Giovani Fascisti* as "Mussolini's Boys".

The main feature of their uniform was the black tasseled *fez*, proudly worn even in action. The *Giovani Fascisti* devices on their colonial uniform were the collar flames in the colors of the *GIL* (Italian Fascist Youth). The *Giovani Fascisti* did not have the black shirt, but wore a gray-green or khaki shirt. Gray-green uniforms were also worn. The baggy pantaloons of this figure were referred to as "*alla zuava*" (*zouave* type) and had an internal reinforcement .Wearing two pairs of socks was a common Italian habit. This Lance-Sergeant displays on the left breast the shield awarded for Young Sporting Games (*Ludi Iuveniles*), plus the ribbon of *benemerito della GIL* (selected young members of the *GIL*).

The Young Fascists were never issued with steel helmets. The infantry equipment of the "Mussolini's Boy" depicted here is rather worn The battle flag, or *fiamma,* bears a Mussolini motto and the battalion's number.

The M1938 musket T.S. (special troops), is positioned ready for combat (with its bayonet nearby). A Wilsco box of corned beef was a real delicacy for Italian soldiers in Africa. Not infrequently the sole meal of the day was just a few syrup peaches and hard tack. The luckiest men could be supplied with a liter of salty water in a characteristic Italian bottle covered with straw (*fiasco*). There were quite a lot of tinned goods or A.M. (*Amministrazione Militare*), but these were nicknamed *Animale Morto,* or "dead animal" by the Italians, and *Alter Mann,* or "old man" by the Germans (referring to the meal ration contained in the tin)!

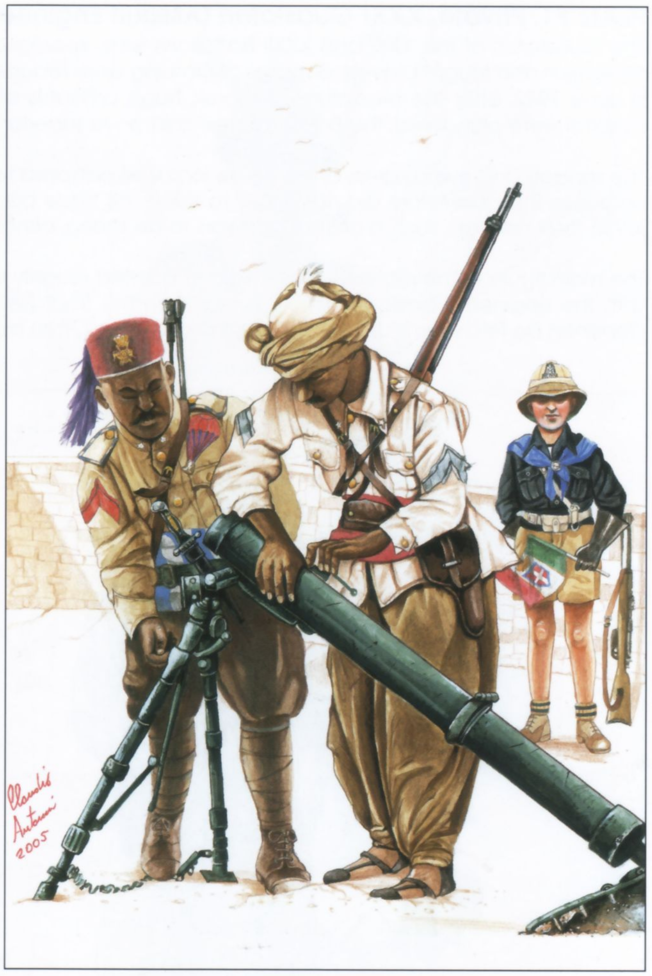
PLATE E2/E3. Corporal (*Caporale Libico*), Libyan Paratroopers (*Fanti dell'Aria*); Sergeant (*Sergente Libico*), Saharan Group (*Gruppo Sahariano*), Libya, 1940-42

The Libyan divisions were famed for their loyalty and pugnacity. Thus a battalion of Libyan Parachutists was organized and personally selected by Marshal Balbo. In March 1939 they fought at El Fteiah (*Gruppo Mobile Tonini*). At a later time, Libyan mobile units (*Gruppi Sahariani*) were also enlisted. These were modern and heavily mechanized units, and here in this plate we can see a squad operating 81mm mortars.

The personal weapons of Libyan troops varied enormously, with M1891 rifles or even Austrian 8mm *Mannlicher* M1895 repeating rifles being in evidence. Meanwhile, paratroops usually had M91/38 or M1938 T.S. muskets. Machine guns varied from the old *Schwarzlose* M07/12 (of Austrian WWI vintage) to the anti-aircraft 20mm *Breda*. The combat dagger of the Paratroops is interesting - it was the old Fascist Militia's bayonet from the Wetterly rifle. The man on the right is armed with an old 1889 *Bodeo-Glisenti* revolver. Note the characteristic ammunition pouch worn by this man. Some Libyans equipped by the DAK operated as native scouts for the Germans. Native troops wore uniforms that showed their colonial status. The paratrooper on the left wears Libyan national headgear, or *tachia,* with a colonial infantry badge and skullcap.

His comrade displays the *Cabus-beda* cap/turban draped according to the tribal fashion of the owner (this tribe is *Kabila*). The M1929 tunic, or *giubba,* was peculiar to colonial troops, and here he has the rigid shoulder tabs and characteristic large parachute badge on the right.

The sergeant has a white version of the *camiciotto sahariano per coloniali* in M1940 pattern. Both figures display the stars, or *stellette,* on the collars, since Libyan troops were granted Italian citizenship as of December 1941. Similarly, the rank badges were also redesigned. Usually paratroops or *Fanti dell'Aria* wore pantaloons and puttees or socks – while our *Sergente Libico* on the right has the native Arab *sirwal* folded trousers and *balga,* or traditional sandals. The most distinctive item worn by the Libyans was the colored sash that varied according to the battalion. Note on the right a young Fascist boy of Libya (*balilla*).



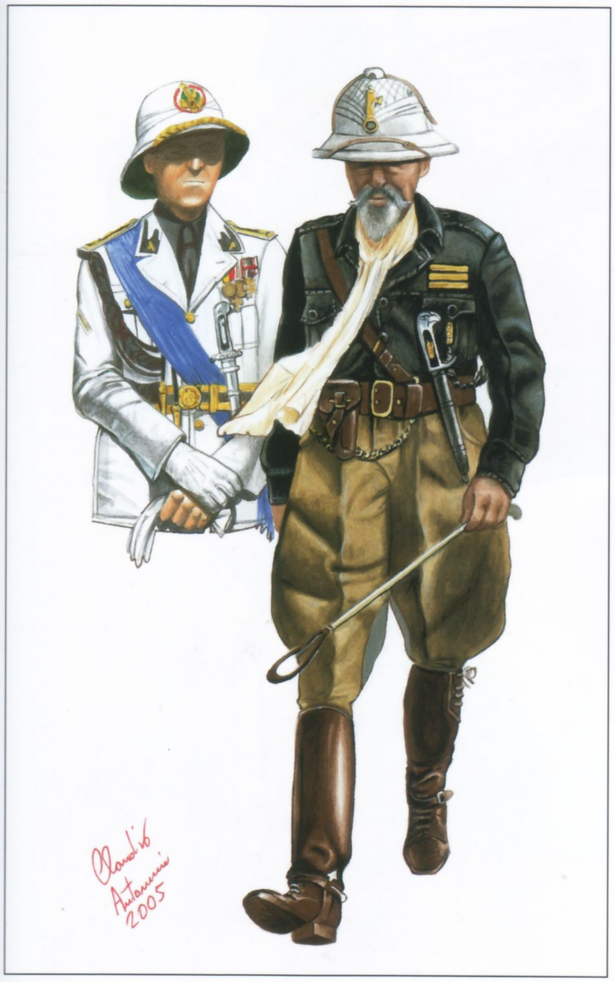


PLATE E4. Centurion (*Centurione*), 2nd Division "*28 Ottobre*" *Libica* (Libyan), 1940-41

Blackshirt units, or *CCNN. Camicie Nere,* had a rank organization that recalled the ancient Roman Legions, so the rank of *Centurione* was equivalent to the Army's Captain. According to the orders of the *Duce Mussolini,* three divisions of Blackshirts were attached to XXIII and XXII Corps - *23 Marzo, 28 Ottobre,* and *3 Gennaio.* Such legions bore the celebrated dates of the Fascist revolution in their titles (see Plate A4).

The 1st Division "*28 Ottobre*" suffered heavy losses during the early stages of the Libyan Campaign, facing the hardened 4th Indian Division, 7th Armoured Division, and 6th Australian Division. This combat was particularly heavy around the sites of Bardia, Sollum and Sidi Barrani. The officer's colonial uniform has the same cut as the M1940 continental uniform, but it was made of *kaki-oliva* (olive-khaki) material. This could be gabardine for winter or cotton for the summertime (see Plate D2). The experience of colonial uniforms for Italy went back to at least the Ethiopian Campaign in 1935-36. Nevertheless, officers and enlisted men adapted their uniforms to the necessities of a modern "fast" war in the desert.

Here the centurion figure wears an elegant off-white colonial helmet of the "Aden" pattern, worked with a quilted surface. The brass badge of the fasces bears the number "231" of the Legion. This officer has discarded the tunic and tie of his ordinary colonial dress for greater comfort, so exposing his black shirt. On the left breast there are the three bars of the rank badge of a *centurione,* as prescribed by regulations (compare with Plate A4).

The Sam Browne holds the 7.65mm Beretta pistol in place. The Fascist Militia dagger is an officer's variant. The olive-khaki breeches show two black stripes flanking the red piping of the infantry. The breeches also have suede internal reinforcement. The white scarf and the whip are items of a smartly dressed officer, although they were useful against dust and mosquitoes too. Many Blackshirts were seasoned veterans of the *Arditi* (assault troops) in WWI, Ethiopia (1935), and even of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Such officers often ended their days in British prisoner of war camps in Kenya, Sudan and India (no fewer than twenty-two Italian generals were captured in the Libyan Campaign in 1940-41). The long active service of the centurion is marked by his aiguillettes with golden fasces. Smart white uniforms were no longer worn on active service (see the inset).

PLATE F1. Private, XXXI *Guastatori* (Assault Engineers) Battalion, El Alamein, 1942

The *Guastatori* of the XXXI and XXXII Battalions were special assault engineers (*Genio*). In the "cauldron" of El Alamein they operated in the minefields and fought bravely. Supplies of clothing were reduced or halted by RAF aerial interdiction of Axis shipping to North Africa. Fortunately in June 1942, after the recapture of Tobruk, huge amounts of Commonwealth uniforms were captured. Even pajamas from a British military hospital were plundered. The British "aertex" shirt gave superior ventilation and sun protection.

The sandals and overall dress of the figure look well adapted to the desert conditions. Note the single 9mm Beretta pistol, suitable for an assault engineer. The *guastatore* did not forget to stitch his trade badge on to his British shirt. Both men in the illustration protect their heads with the M933 steel helmet - such a helmet appears to be strong, although perhaps a little heavy. This helmet was in service in Italy until the 1990s!

The main figure in the plate wears his helmet painted roughly in a sand color, while the officer sports his helmet in the original gray-green finish, with the engineers' badge painted in black on the front (see also Plates C3 and F2). The officer figure in the background is 1st Lieutenant (*Tenente*) De Rita who is defusing a British MK. IV mine. Often mines were buried in double layers to increase the devastating blast. De Rita wears a fine white *sahariana* with black shoulder boards, complete with the crimson piping of the engineers, two rank stars, and the brass branch badge. A dagger of the Fascist militia and a Sam Browne belt complete his uniform.

Although the *Folgore* and the *Guastatori* had no effective anti-tank weapons, they bravely assaulted British Grant and Sherman tanks with *Molotov* incendiary bottles. In this plate some examples found on the El Alamein battlefield are shown. Some of them are made from British beer bottles – captured in huge quantities at Tobruk. Alongside the *Molotov* cocktails, *oto* hand grenades are also depicted. Such grenades were nicknamed "red devils".

An Italian veteran from Libya recalls how there was nobody in his unit able to cut hair, so the soldiers often sported unkempt hair! Experienced soldiers knew well that minor wounds did not heal well in the African climate. Thus they applied tincture of iodine on their wounds.

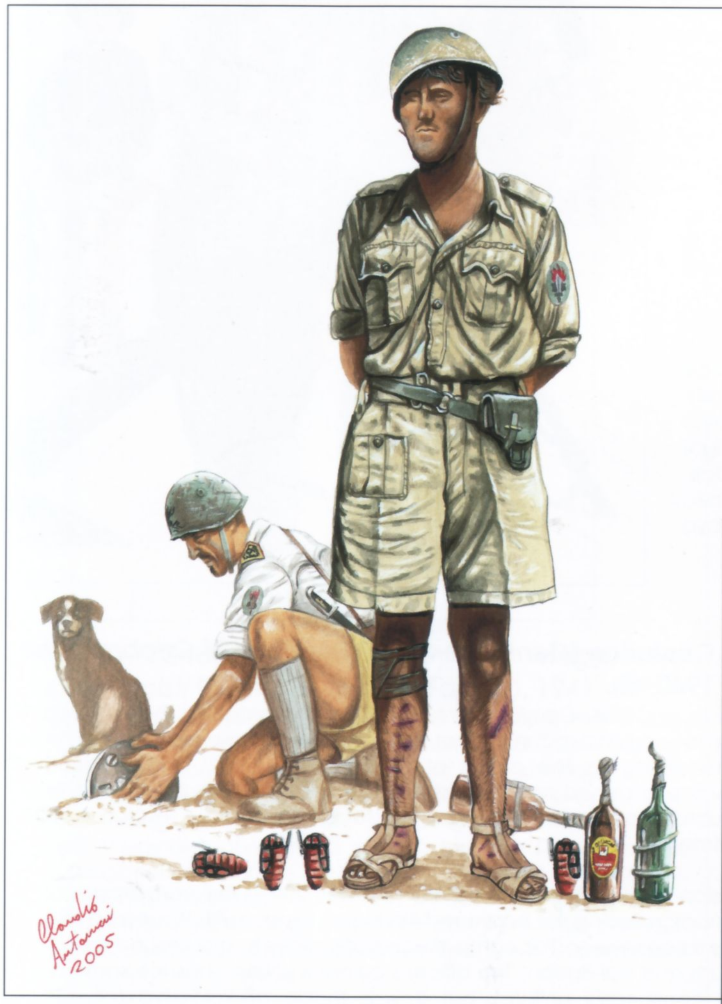


PLATE F2. Lance-Sergeant (*Caporal Maggiore*) Tuvo, Flamethrower operator, XXXI Assault Engineer Battalion, 1942

Flamethrower operators were equipped with the Mod. 41 flamethrower, and had a special suit made of asbestos material. Italian flamethrower operators, or *lanciafiamme*, performed extensive service in the desert. There are tales about *Guastatori* who operated against enemy lines and panicked Commonwealth troops with their flamethrowers. Actually, Italy had much experience in flamethrower warfare dating back to WWI and Ethiopia in 1936.

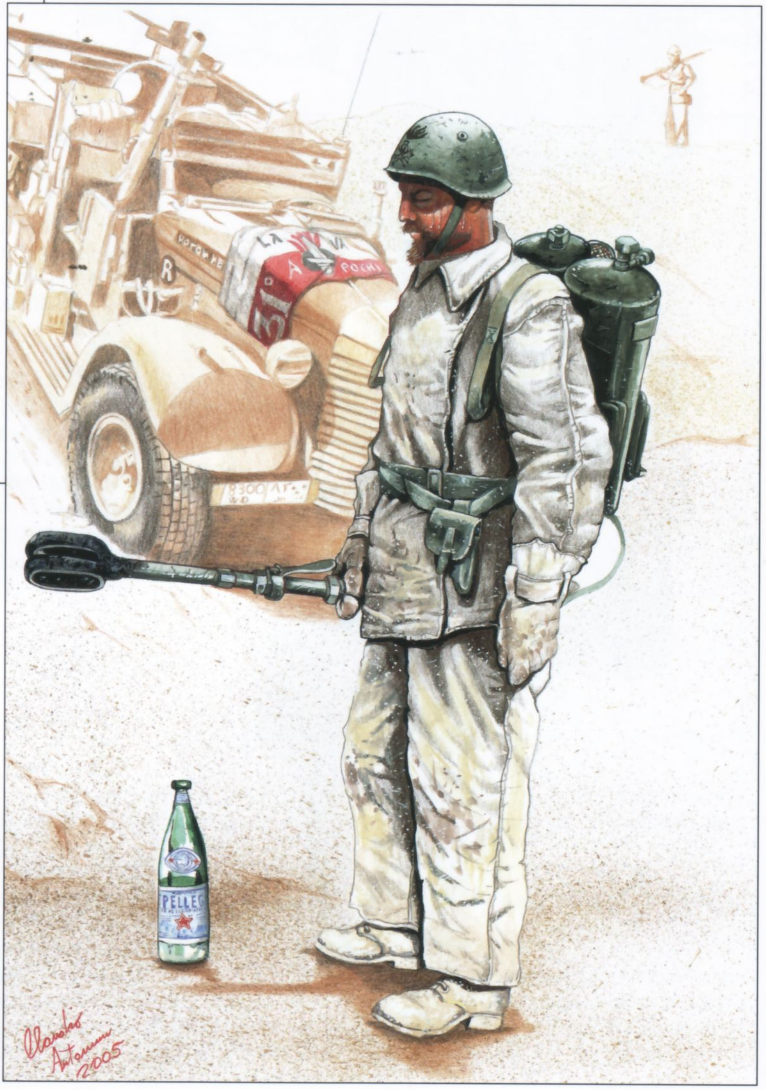
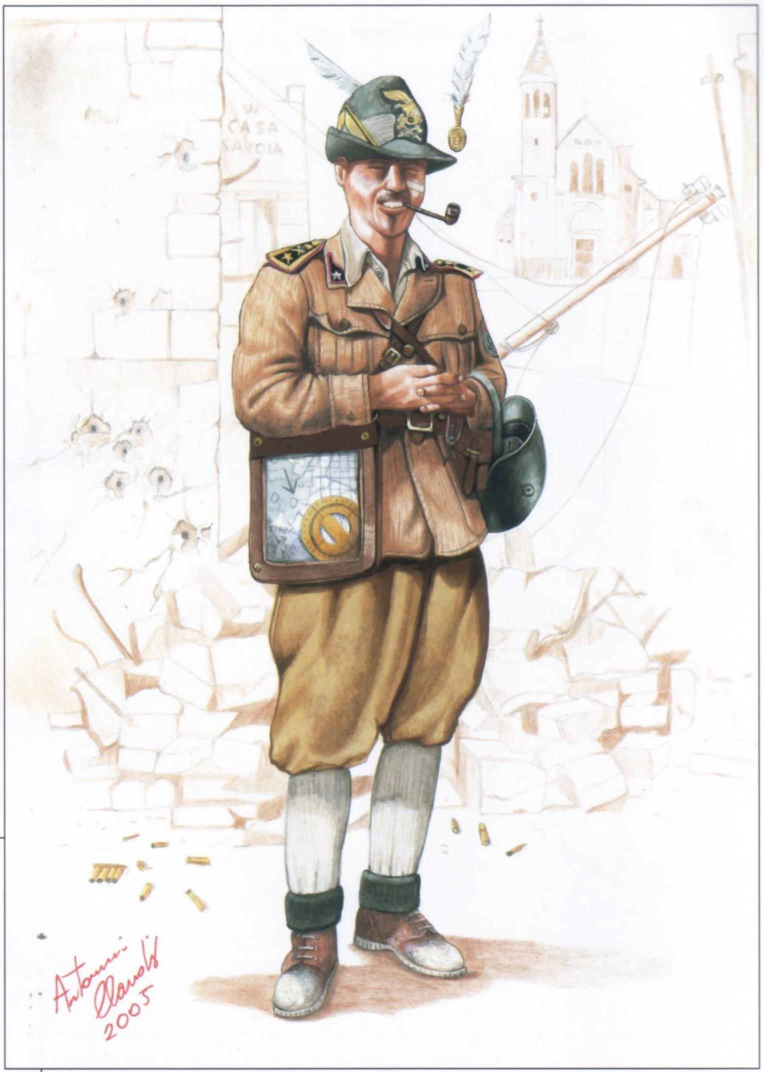


PLATE F3. Major (*Maggiore*) Caccia Dominioni, Commander of the XXXI Assault Engineer Battalion, bombed city of Tobruk, 1942

Major Caccia Dominioni, Count of Sillavengo, was the famous commander of the XXXI *Guastatori* Battalion, which saw hard fighting at Tobruk and El Alamein. He still retains his traditional mountain troop hat, or *cappello alpino,* with the badge of the mountain engineers; the inset in the plate shows the brass boss holding the white hawk feather for a senior *Alpini* officer.

The *sahariana* adopted during the war of Ethiopia in 1936 is now made of coarse brown canvas. It is decorated with Engineer collar patches (*pipe* - see Plate F1). The M933 helmet had just been introduced. Caccia Dominioni displays a pair of comfortable chukka boots, loot from Tobruk. This type of footwear was highly appreciated by the Italians. Each Italian officer was ordered to acquire his map case privately. For an officer in North Africa, it was essential to know details about Libyan settlements and terrain, and especially the locations of minefields.



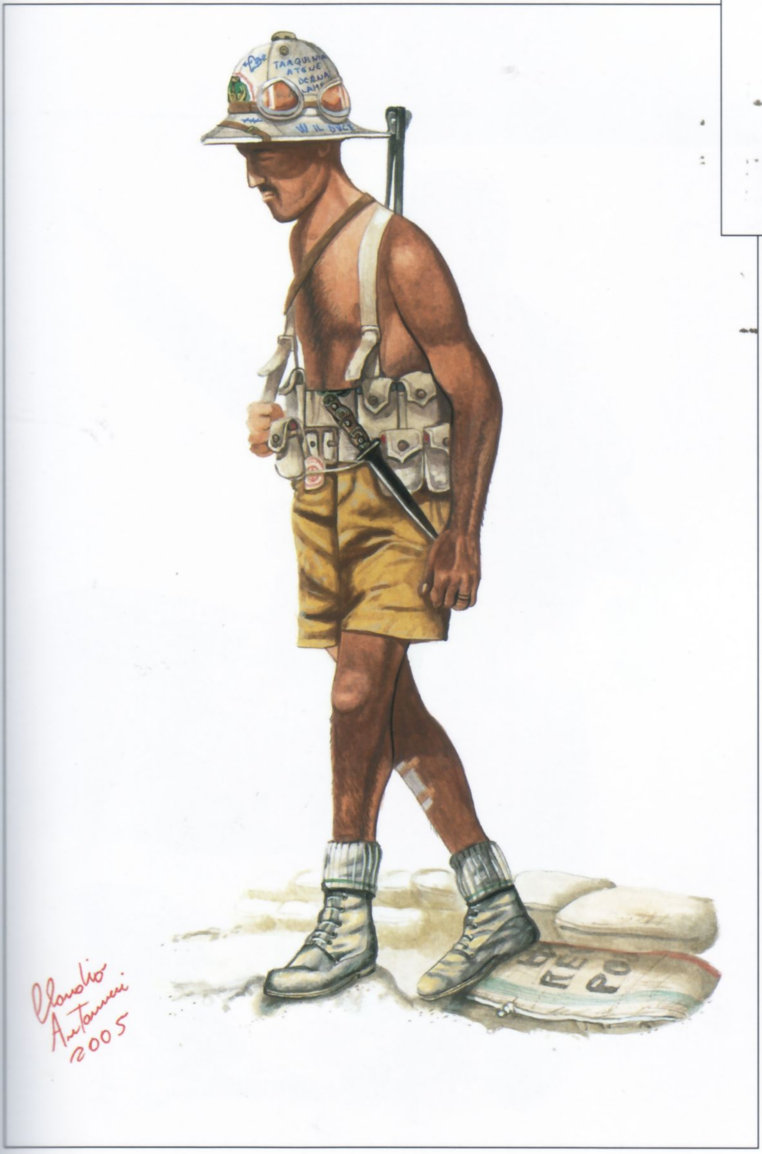


PLATE G1. Paratrooper, *Folgore* Division, El Alamein, (Deir El Munassib), 1942

Although the men of V Battalion, 186th *Folgore* Regiment, were elite, trained soldiers, they all appeared sunburned and skinny. A shortage of fresh food, too little water (and salty at that), caused dysentery among the men. The uncle of the author – a former artillery sergeant at Tobruk in 1941 - recalled that the sole ration per day was often only some jam! (See Plate E1)

Stripped to the waist and wearing shorts, our paratrooper demonstrates the habit, common among Italian privates, of covering their colonial helmets with religious scrawls and political mottoes, names or list of actions. Note the personal web equipment that looks rather modern; it is accompanied by musket magazine pouches and grenade pockets. *Folgore* personnel were issued with special high jump boots with rubber soles. Unfortunately, in the Saharan climate, these should have been replaced, since some paratroopers had their soles completely worn out and their feet covered with sores during the retreat from El Alamein! Note the civilian socks sent by the paratrooper's family.

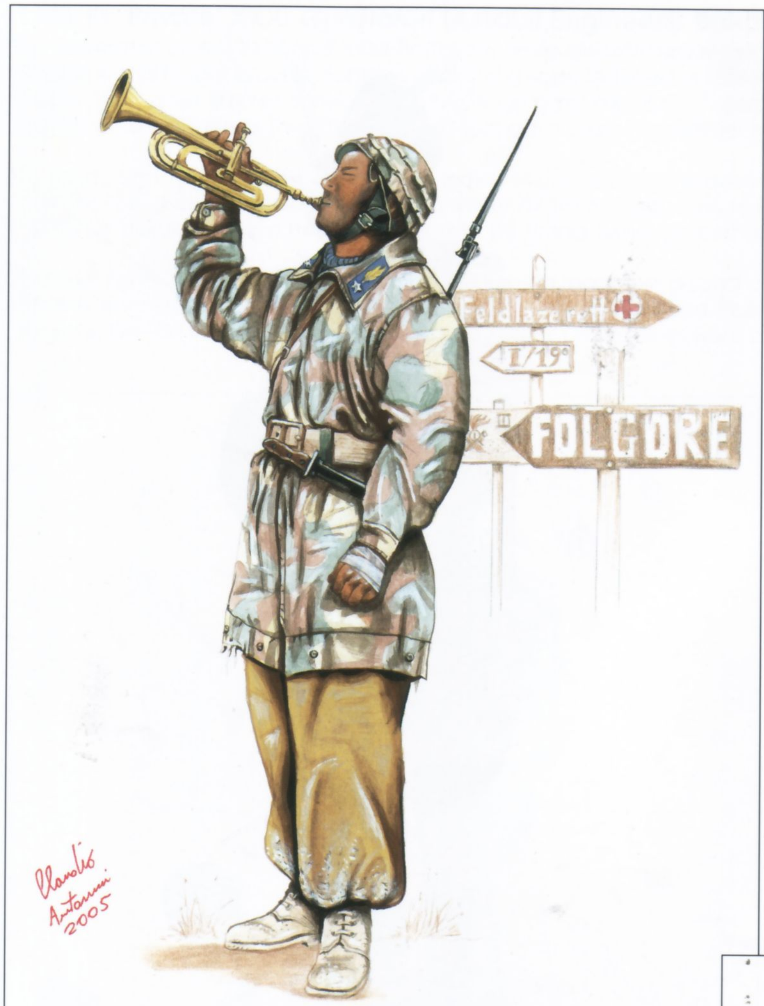


PLATE G2. Trumpeter, X *Folgore* Battalion, El Alamein, 1942

In August 1942, X Paratrooper Battalion was positioned near Deir Alinda and Deir El Munassib. Its commander, Major Rossi, ordered his trumpeter to play the charge against New Zealand troops - an episode of Napoleonic tradition in modern mechanized warfare!

After the good showing of the Libyan *Fanti dell'Aria* (see Plate E2), Italy decided to organize its own paratroops. These *Paracadutisti* had special attire modeled on the German pattern (Plate M3). The Mod. 1942 helmet had a leather nose-guard and a bifurcated chinstrap. The camouflage cover (termed *fodera mimetica per elmetto* M933) was originally designed for the M933 helmet. Note the string that compressed the cover (as copied from an original photo). Some photographs of El Alamein prisoners depict them wearing only the camouflage cover on their heads!

This faded camouflage jump smock (*combinazione mimetica da lancio*) was manufactured in tent canvas, but it was rarely worn in Africa (note the civilian pullover underneath). This paratrooper has attached the traditional *Folgore* collar tabs to his smock.

PLATE G3. Lance-Sergeant (*Caporalmaggiore*), 185th Artillery Regiment, *Folgore* Division, El Alamein, 1942

Today it is hard to believe that at El Alamein, a few hundred Artillery-Paratroopers of the *Folgore*, armed with light M47/32 guns, effectually damaged almost 150 Commonwealth medium tanks. The destroyed tank in the background has an amusing inscription: "American tank, English crew, shot by Italians!" Note the wide trousers worn for comfort (compare with Plates G2, H3, K4, and M3). Rare contemporary photos of El Alamein show men like this one - rather mauled, with no water or food, and poorly armed. It is interesting to note that the woolen knitted cap of our Lance-Sergeant has possibly been taken from British troops.

Note the patched baggy trousers copied from a painting of Caccia Dominioni. They are in a darker olive khaki shade. The peculiar collar patches on the collarless jacket show the Artillery Regiment of the *Folgore*. Note the parachute badge affixed to the left breast. The most characteristic feature of this figure is the field waistcoat, or *samurai*, with submachine gun pouches and pockets for grenades. The personal armament of this paratrooper is the Beretta M38A submachine gun - an excellent weapon of 9mm caliber – even better than similar German and Allied submachine guns. Although issued in limited numbers to fighting regiments, it was officially termed "automatic musket" in Italian use, and it had 10, 20, or 30-round magazines. Note on the right its canvas case used for parachute jumps. During the night, patrols of the *artiglieri – paracadutisti* of the *Folgore* (artillerymen-paratroops) used sports sneakers, whilst the trousers were sometimes filled with sand to protect the wearer from grenade fragments, or to hold the barrel of a mortar.

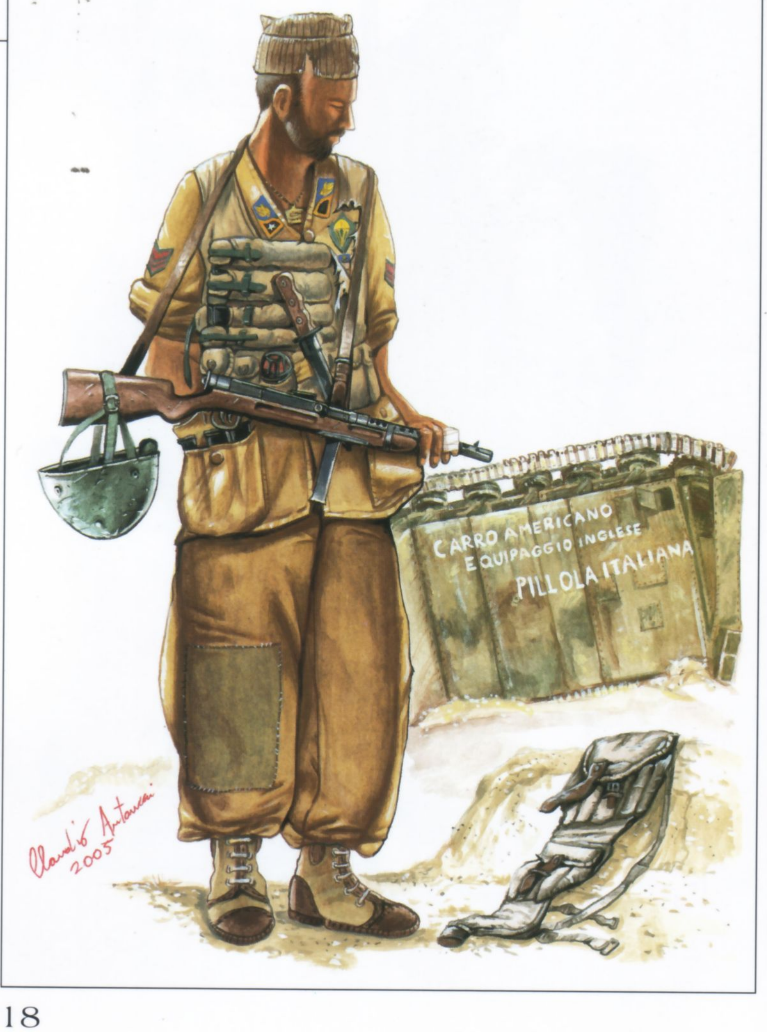
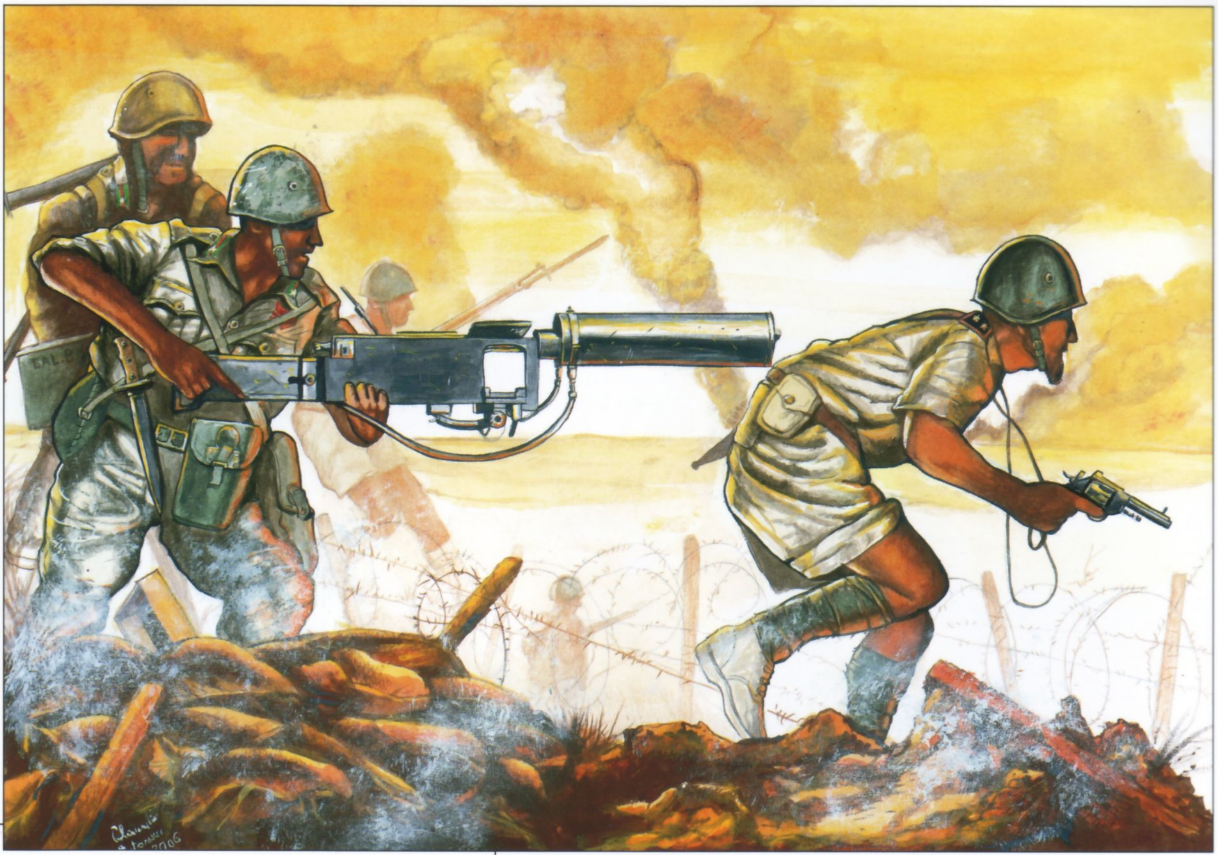


PLATE G4. Infantry, *Pavia* Division, El Alamein, summer 1942

A typical assault squad of the 17th *Pavia* Infantry Division. All the figures are dressed in British garb. Note the use of shorts and Italian puttees. The M933 helmets are painted in Saharan khaki, covered with mud or left in the standard gray-green finish. The leading officer is armed with the *Bodeo-Glisenti* 1889 revolver. The old *Fiat-Revelli* M1914 heavy machine gun is also depicted.



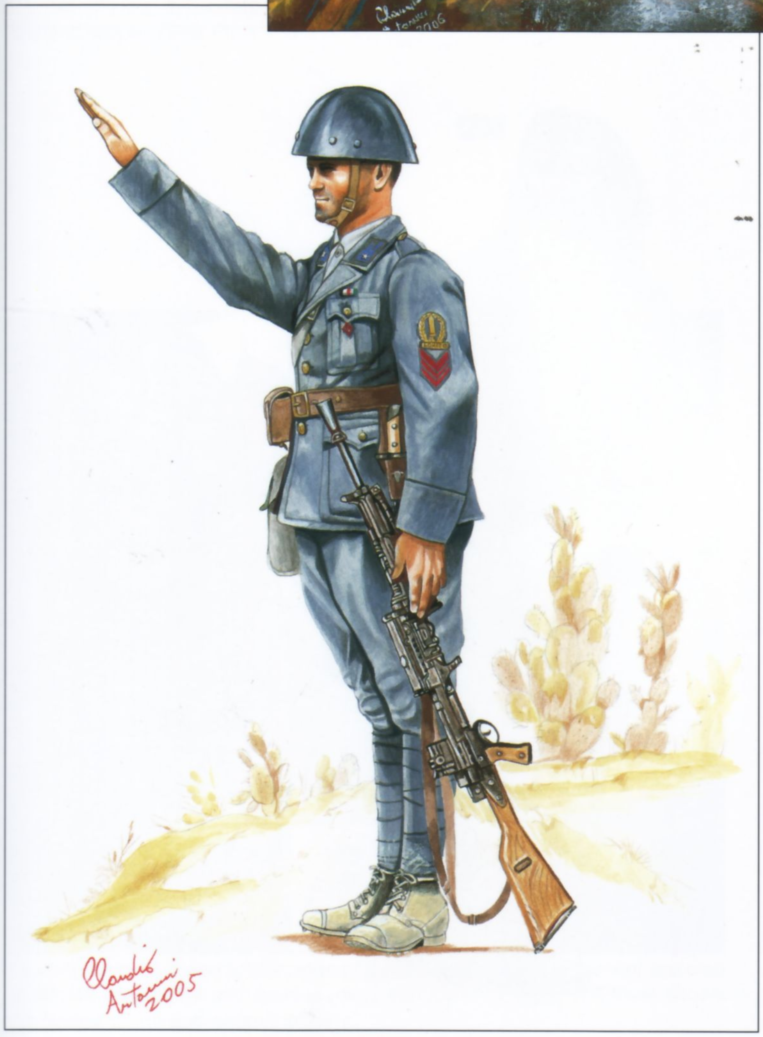


PLATE H1. Lance-Sergeant (*Primo Aviere*), Assault Airborne *Loreto* Battalion, Tunisia, 1943

Similar to the elite troops of the Navy and Army (Plates C2, H2 and H3), the Air General Staff, or *Superaereo,* trained selected men at the paratroop school at Tarquinia. In June 1942, it included the following units: a Parachute Battalion, an Assault Troop Unit (or *Arditi Distruttori Regia Aeronautica* (ADRA)), and the Assault Airborne *Loreto* Battalion. The title of the battalion was sacred to the Virgin Mary of Loreto, patron of the Italian Air Force. The *Loreto* Battalion served as an assault unit along the Enfidaville Line in January 1943. The *Loreto* Battalion dressed in the usual blue-gray Air Force uniform shown here. The special bright blue collar patches, or *fiamme,* are reminiscent of the *Arditi* pattern (see Plate H3).

Note the captured Czech M1934 helmet. The tunic's insignia includes the Italian-German war medal, the badge of Fascist *squadrista* (squad men taking part in the March on Rome in 1922), and the Special Assault *Loreto* Badge on the left sleeve. Note the regulation Air Force brown leather accouterment; surprisingly this Lance-Sergeant, being a 6.5mm Breda 1930 gunner, does not have a pistol. A haversack for the magazines is also used. No colonial garments were issued to the elite forces of the *Regia Aeronautica* (Italian Air Force).

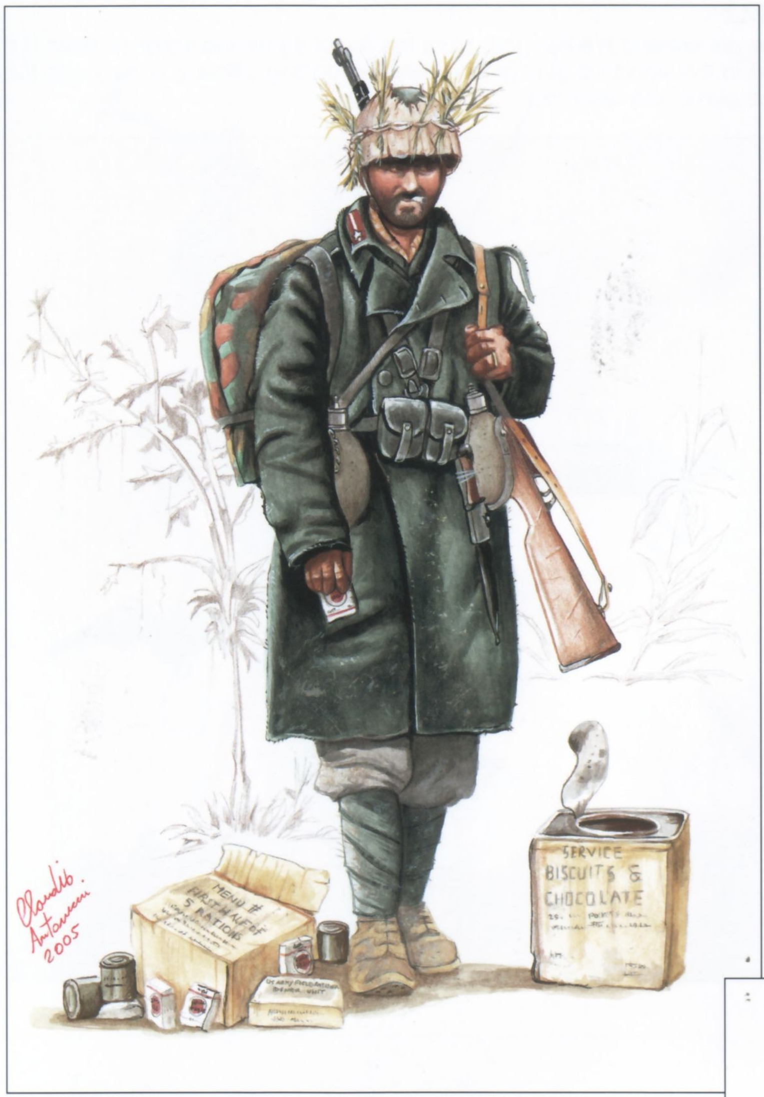


PLATE H2. Private, *Superga* Assault Landing Division, Tunisia, 1943

A large number of units brought over supplies from Italy, so they never received any colonial issues. Thus, in the latter months of the Tunisian Campaign, they fought in continental gray-green M1940 and M1942 uniforms. These were made of cheap cloth termed *lanital*; in fact it consisted of regenerated wool mixed with synthetic rayon.

Again, surprisingly, our figure still wears the lightweight pantaloon fatigues, called *bigia*. Note the tent camouflaged poncho folded over the pack. The M1929 poncho was made of waterproof canvas, in a sand, gray-green and red-brown scheme on one camouflage side, and umber and red-brown on the reverse. The Italian Army was the first to issue such camouflaged tent ponchos.

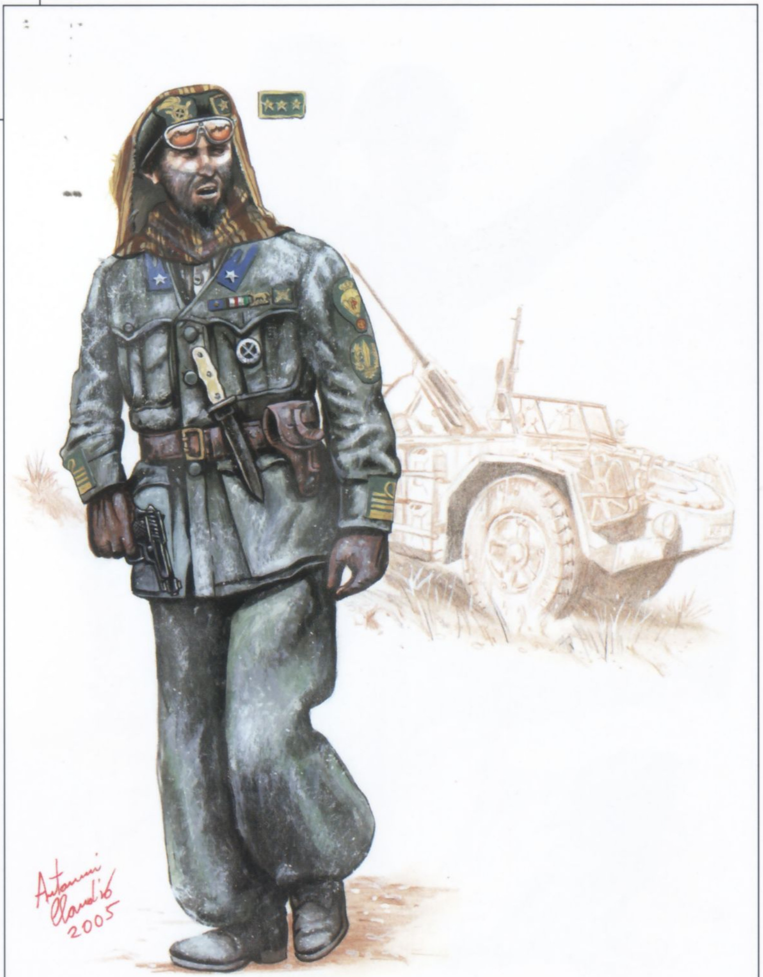
Two water bottles appear as the normal accouterment for Italian troops in North Africa (see also Plate E1). Even in 1943 the Italians were still using the impractical puttees. Following the Allied style, the helmets were effectively camouflaged with a rough Hessian cover, to avoid the semi-gloss paint of the helmet being visible to enemy snipers on a damp night! Foliage could be also added in the cover's strips to offer camouflage in the bushy terrain of Tunisia. The tunic worn under the M1934 greatcoat has wooden buttons (as does the greatcoat), and it shows the collar patches of the 91st Regiment – *Superga* Division. At first it was trained as an assault landing unit for the conquest of Malta, but like many other elite Italian divisions, the *Superga* served as conventional line infantry. Note the bayonet secured with a cord to prevent it being lost in action.

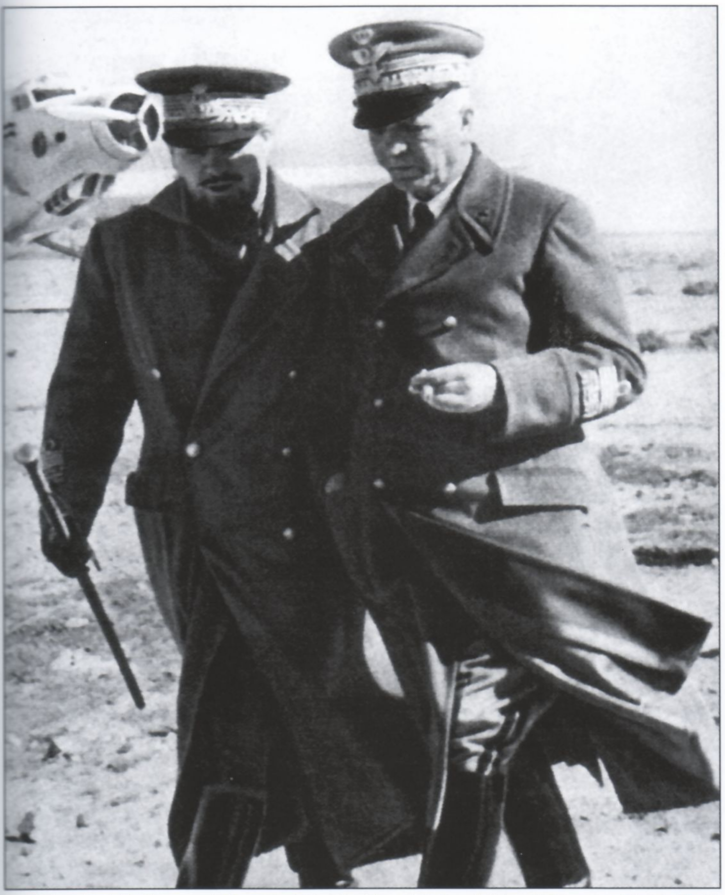
PLATE H3. Colonel (Colonnello), X Arditi (*Commando*) Regiment, Tunisia, 1943

During the crucial year of 1942, the Italian Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and Royal Army began organizing handpicked commandos, following the example of the British Long Range Desert Group and Special Air Service (see also Plates C2 and H1). An interesting war documentary shot by U.S. combat camera units shows a color image of *Arditi* war prisoners in Tunisia. The X *Arditi* Regiment wore the continental version of the paratrooper dress (see Plate G3).

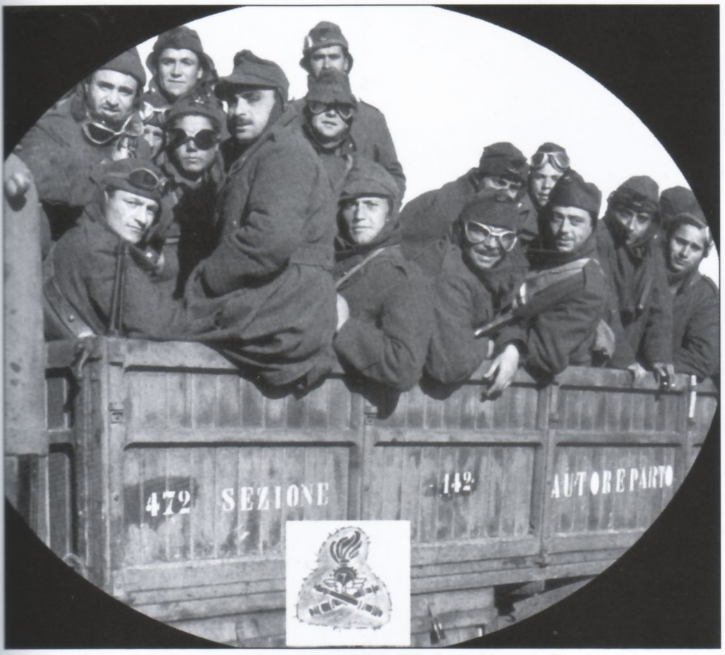
Uniform included a characteristic beret with a hoop on the top, plus comfortable baggy trousers. The badge of the beret was unique to X *Arditi*. The inset shows the left rank badge of a colonel. The bush jacket has special blue collar flames, whilst its cuffs bear regulation rank lace. The badge of the *Arditi* – elite assault troops of WWI – is positioned on the left sleeve, under other interesting insignia (the badge of a parachutist instructor who has completed twenty-five jumps). The devices on the left breast are: a bronze valor medal, Italian-German medal, the "she-wolf" of the *Pasubio* Division, and the badge of war promotion. Since this Colonel was a former officer of the *Pasubio* Division, he has the silvered round badge of the Russian Front.

Note the standard 9mm Beretta Pistol and the combat dagger with ivory grip for senior officers. Our figure displays captured U.S. Ray-Ban sunglasses! The X *Arditi* Regiment had an autonomous mechanized unit that ambushed the enemy behind Allied lines (sometimes even concealed under Arab clothing). This practice was attested to by 1st Lieutenant Rossini, a former officer of the *Pavia*, and who later transferred to the *Arditi*.

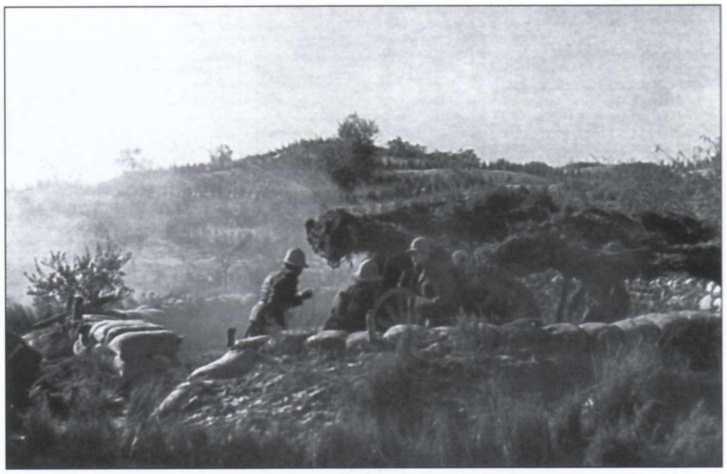




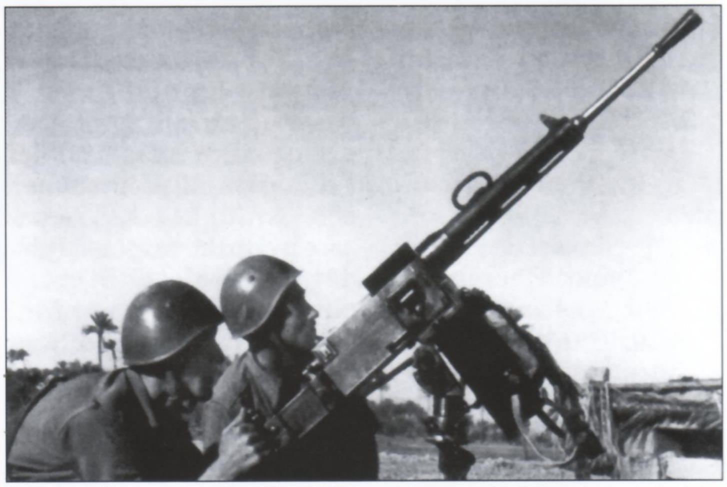
Air Marshal Balbo and Marshal Badoglio of Italy visiting Libya in 1940. Both senior officers wear blue-gray woolen quality cloth and olive-khaki for colonial officers. In the background the SM 79 (I-MANU) personal aircraft of Balbo is visible. (See Plate A1)



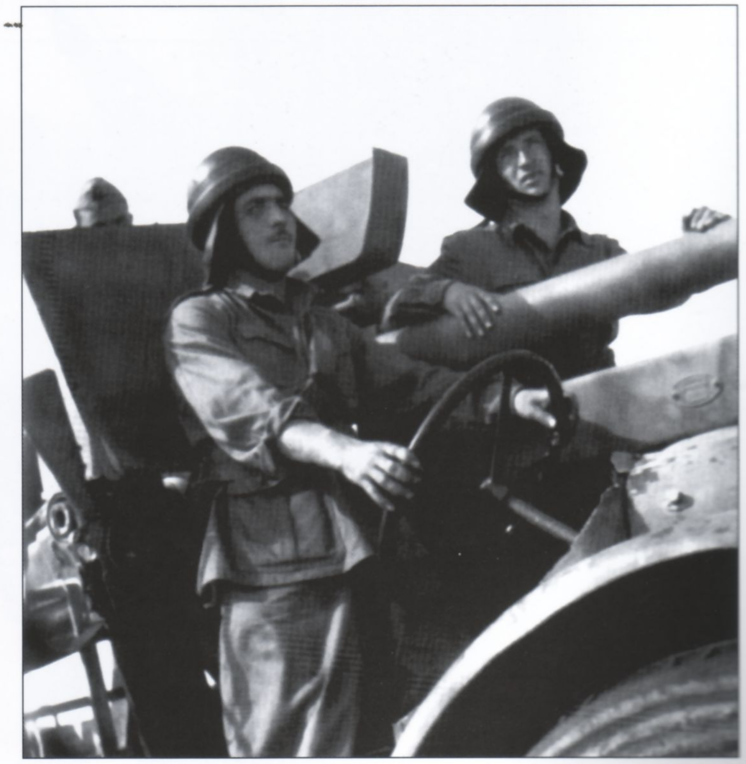
Feeling the cold, these artillerymen of the 7th Anti-Aircraft Regiment are clad in M1940 greatcoats and *bustine* (cap) with lowered flaps. The inset shows the badge of the anti-aircraft artillery.



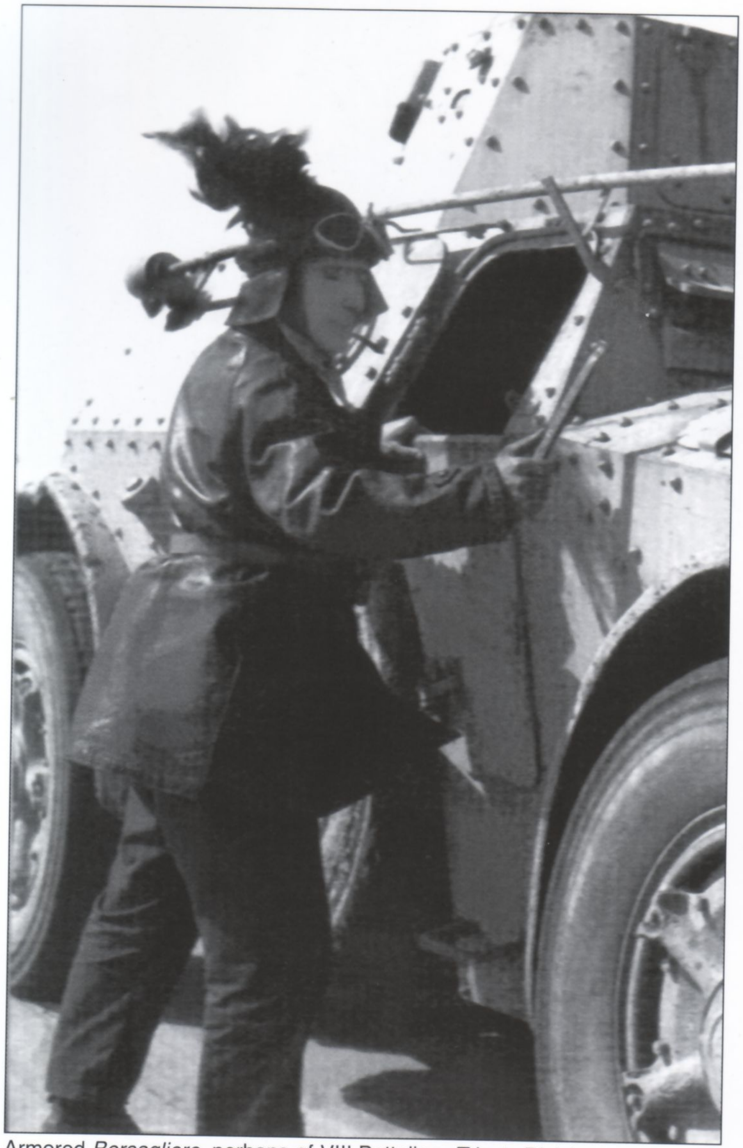
Rare photo of Italian heavy field artillerymen in the early stages of the African War, 1940. They are dressed in the usual continental gray-green attire, along with colonial helmets (149/90 guns).



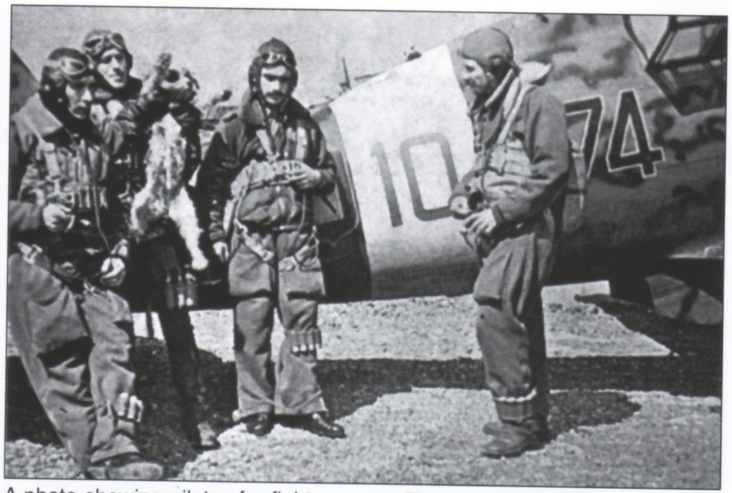
Anti-aircraft gunners with a Fiat M35 machine gun. In the early period of the African War, steel helmets were supplied only in limited numbers. The photo was possibly taken at the Siwa Oasis in 1940.



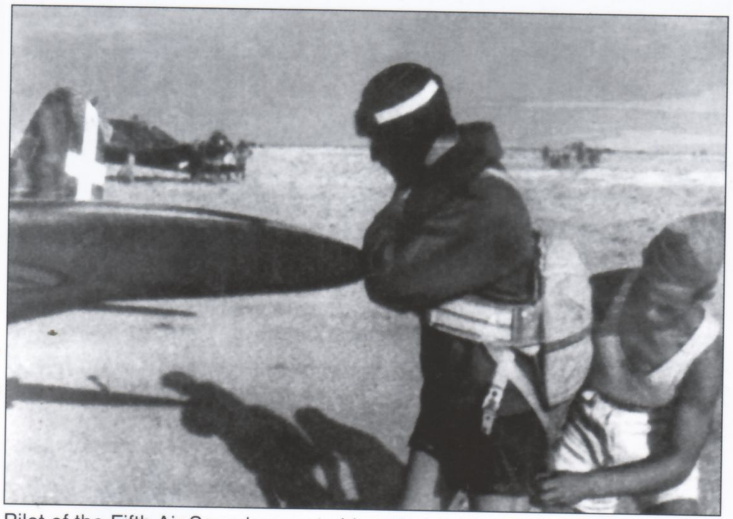
A crew of an Italian *autocannone Lancia 3 Ro* 105/28mm (motorized artillery). They wear leather helmets and khaki garments. Initial stages of the desert war, 1940. (See Plate B2)



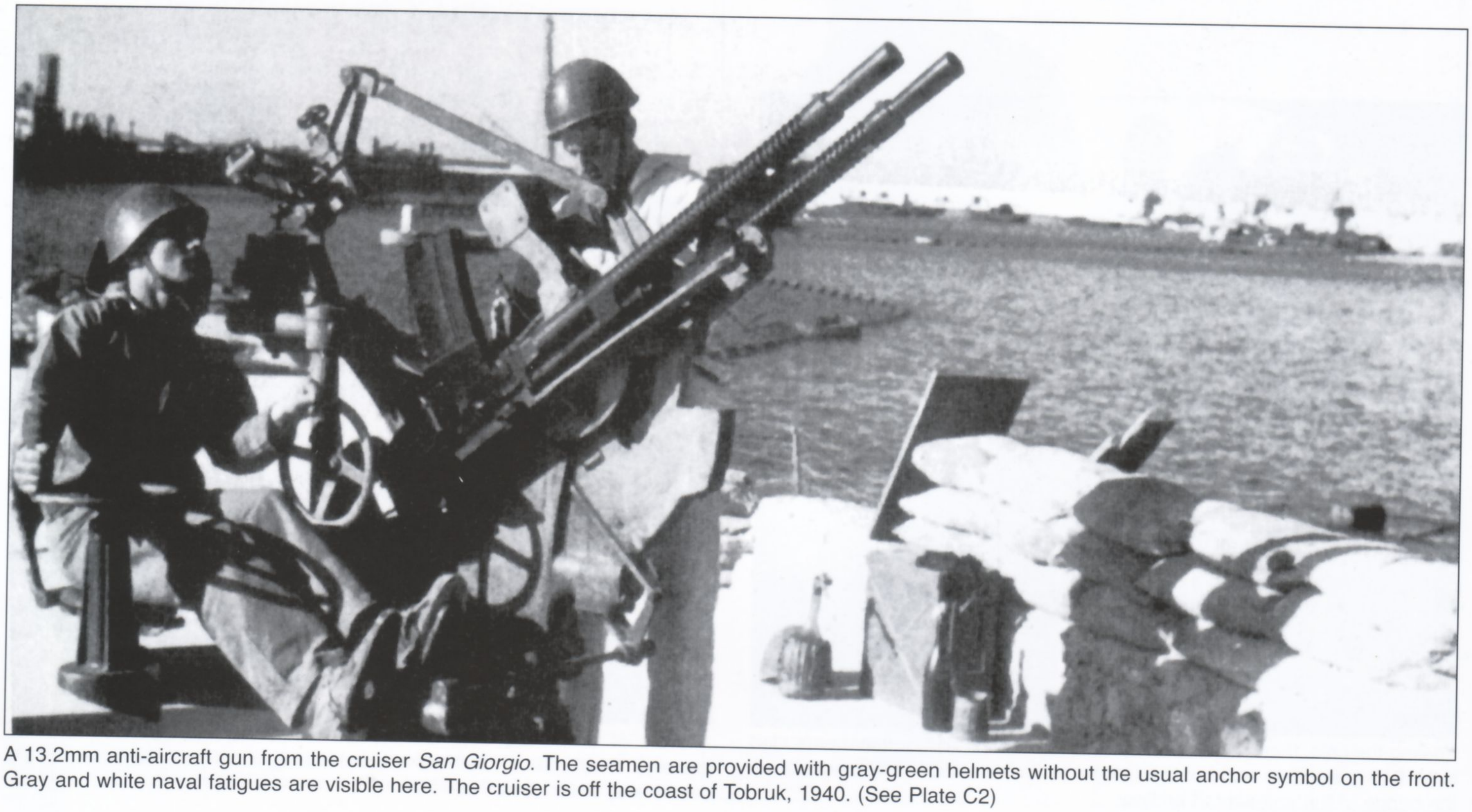
Armored *Bersagliere,* perhaps of VIII Battalion, *Trieste* Division.



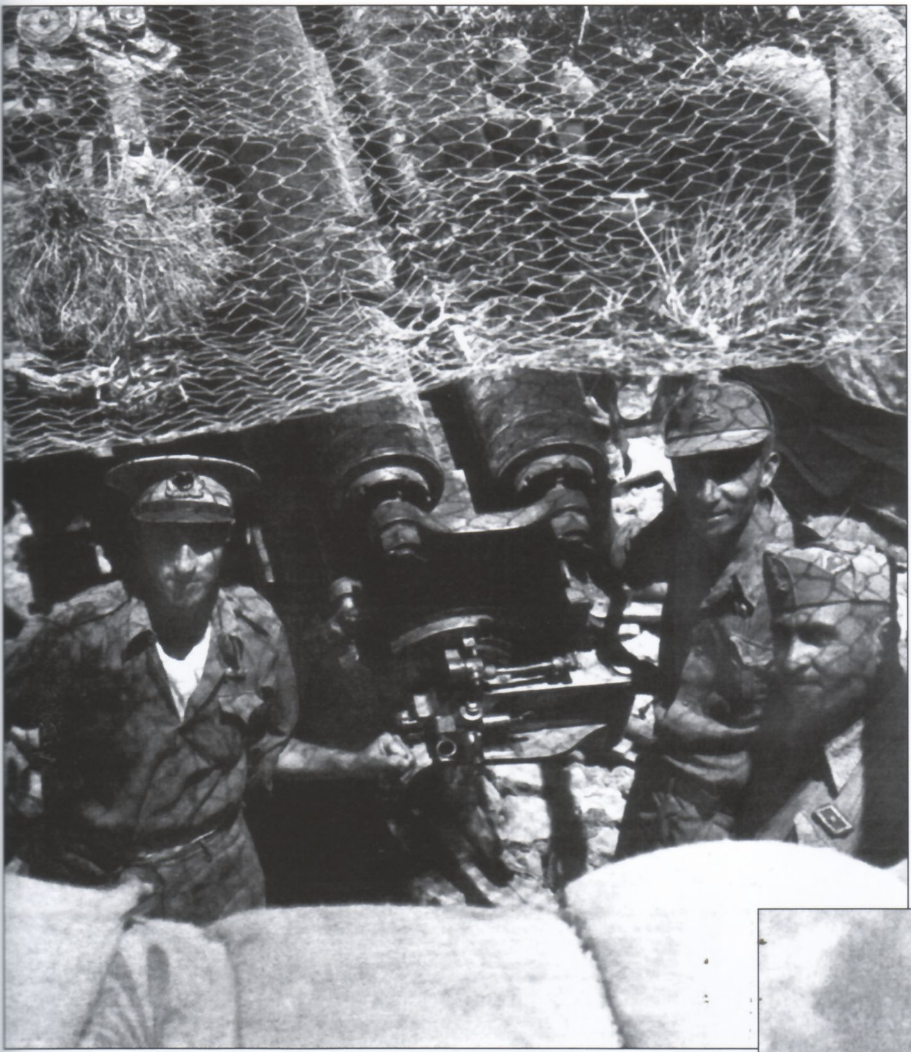
A photo showing pilots of a fighter group. They have khaki winter suits and flying helmets. Note the parachute equipment and the flare pistol ammunition on their sides (1940-41). (See Plate B1)



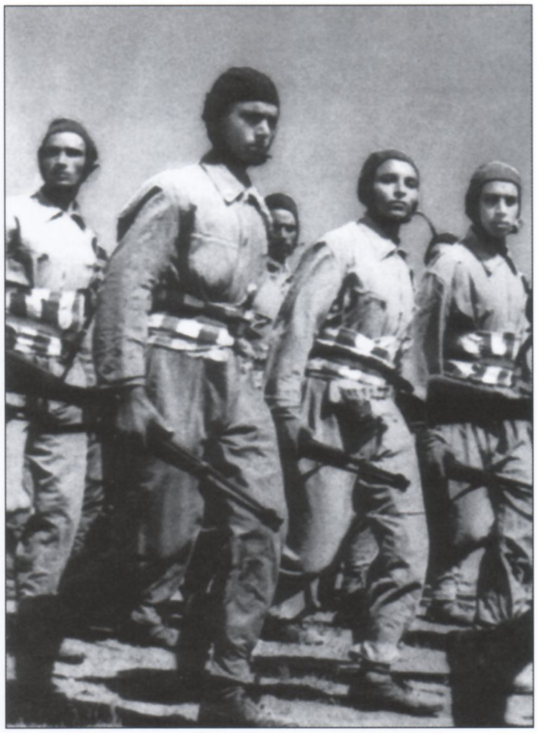
Pilot of the Fifth Air Squadron; note his orderly with original outfit and fatigue cap. The location is an airfield in Libya, 1940.



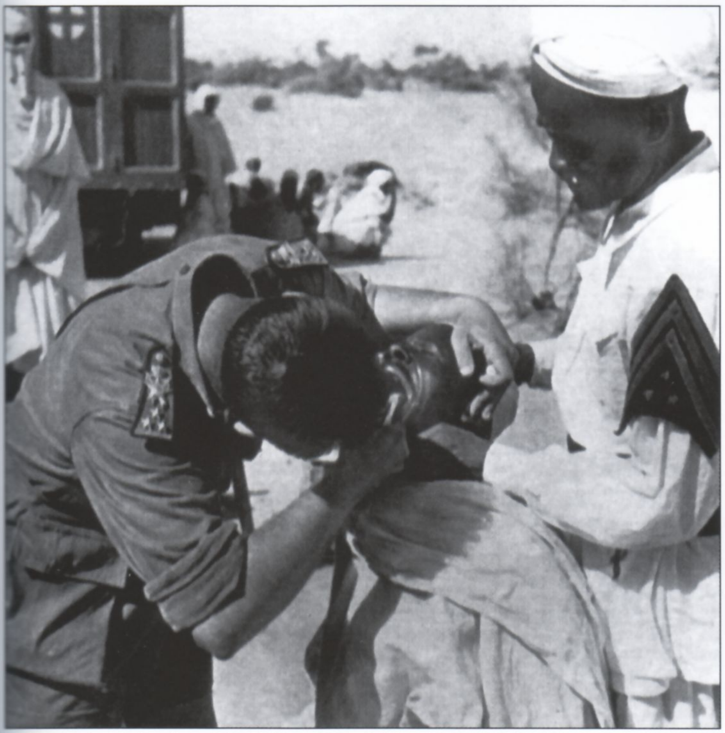
A 13.2mm anti-aircraft gun from the cruiser *San Giorgio.* The seamen are provided with gray-green helmets without the usual anchor symbol on the front. Gray and white naval fatigues are visible here. The cruiser is off the coast of Tobruk, 1940. (See Plate C2)



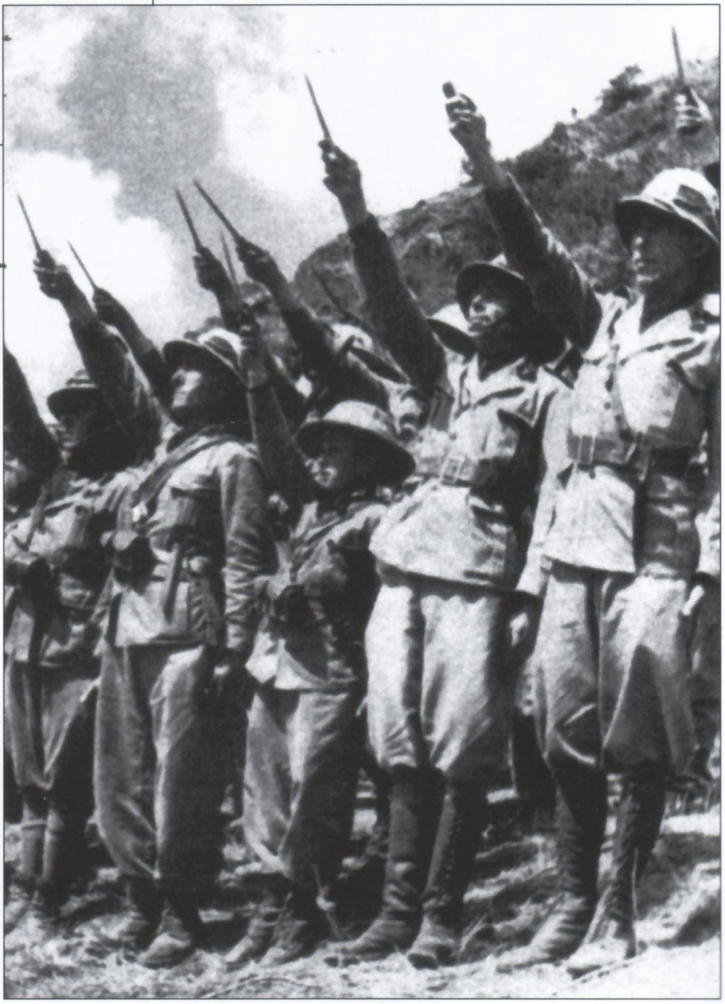
An extra heavy naval gun in an anti-aircraft position. The minimal dress of the seamen and Army major is suitable for the desert.



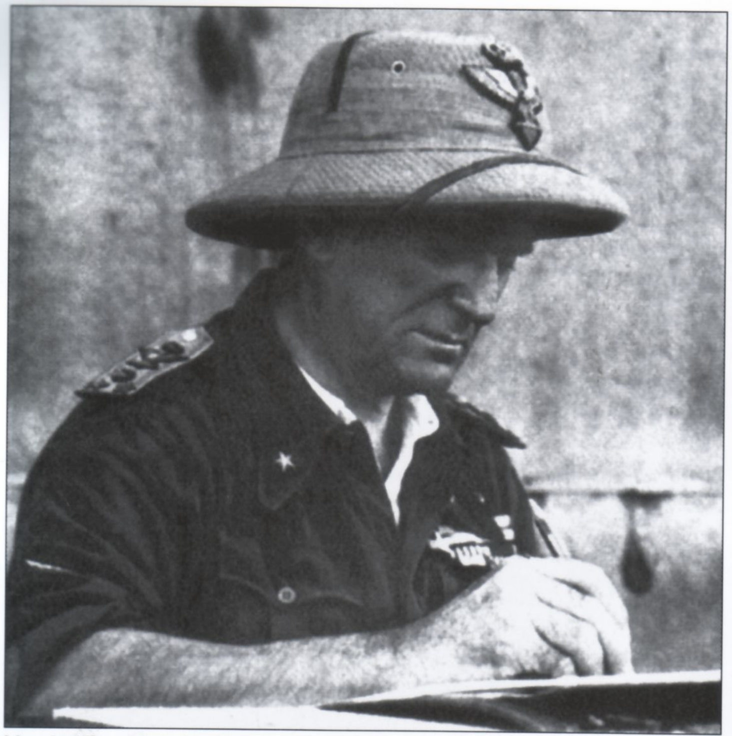
A unique postcard of Libyan paratroopers. They wear leather jump helmets and khaki overalls. 1940. (See Plate E2)



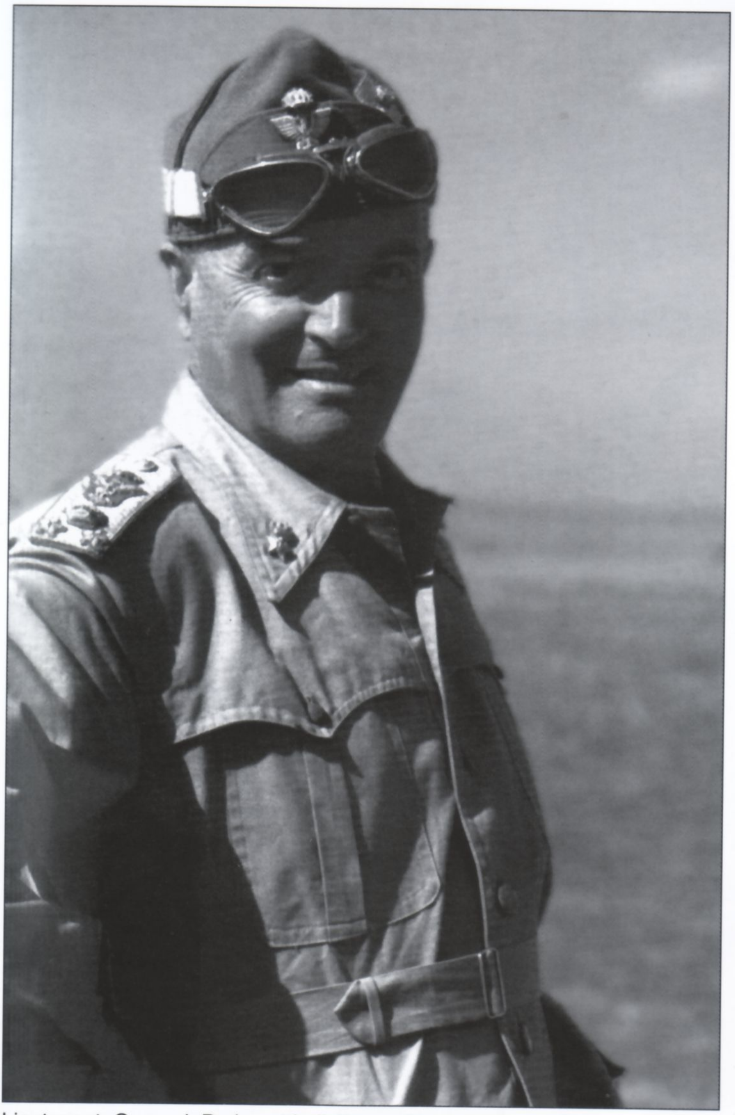
A *Centurione* dentist of the Blackshirts. This photo clearly shows his shoulder boards and the gaudy rank badge of a *scium basci capo* (Staff Sergeant) of the native camel riders (1940).



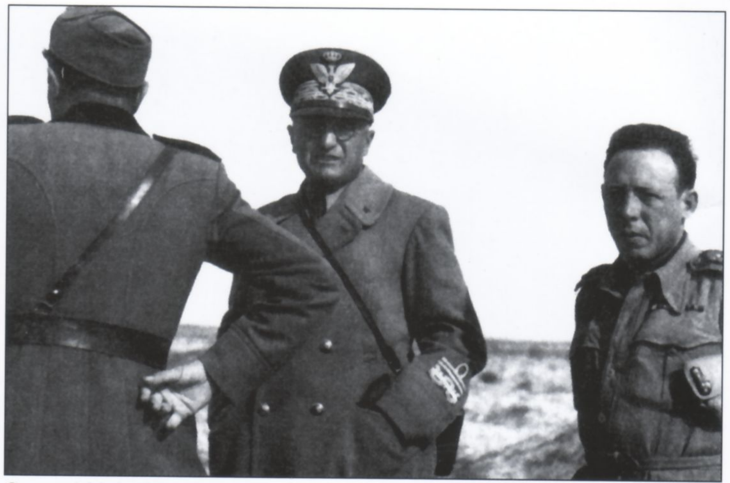
Blackshirts and their young comrade give their commander a Fascist salute with unsheathed daggers, Libya 1940. This salute greatly impressed Prime Minister Chamberlain during his visit to Rome in January 1939!



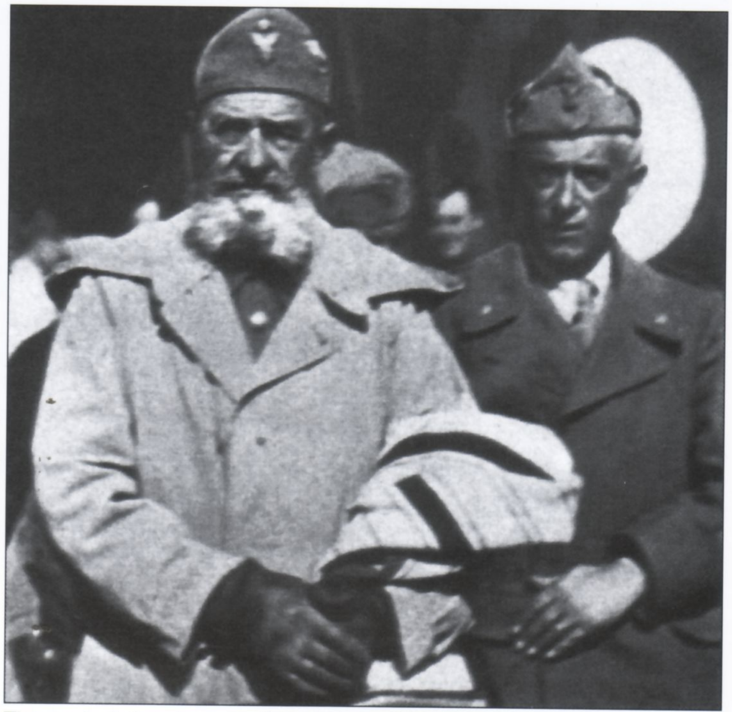
Marshal Graziani of Italy proudly sports an "Aden" colonial helmet with gaudy eagle and dark brown shirt. The date is September 1940.



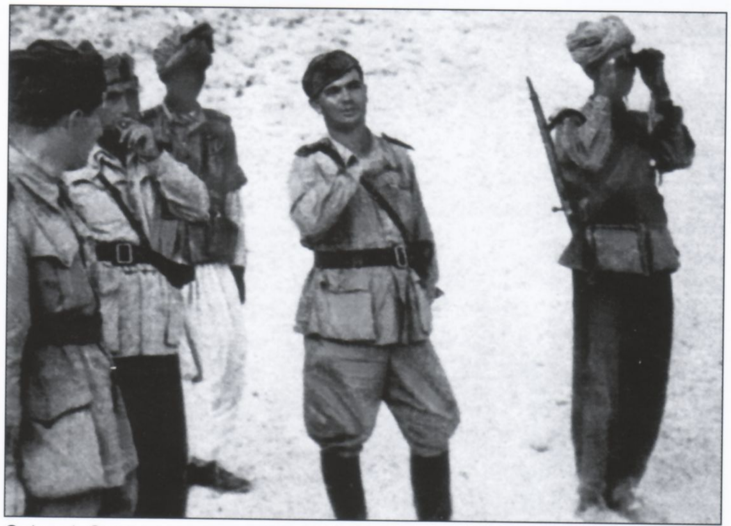
Lieutenant General Barbasetti di Prun, Chief of Staff (Superior Tactical Command 4/21). Barbasetti displays a stylish colonial outfit with fine rank shoulder boards. Note the collar stars of the General Staff.



General Maletti in winter colonial dress (*divisa coloniale*). On the right is an officer of the Blackshirts. December 1940.

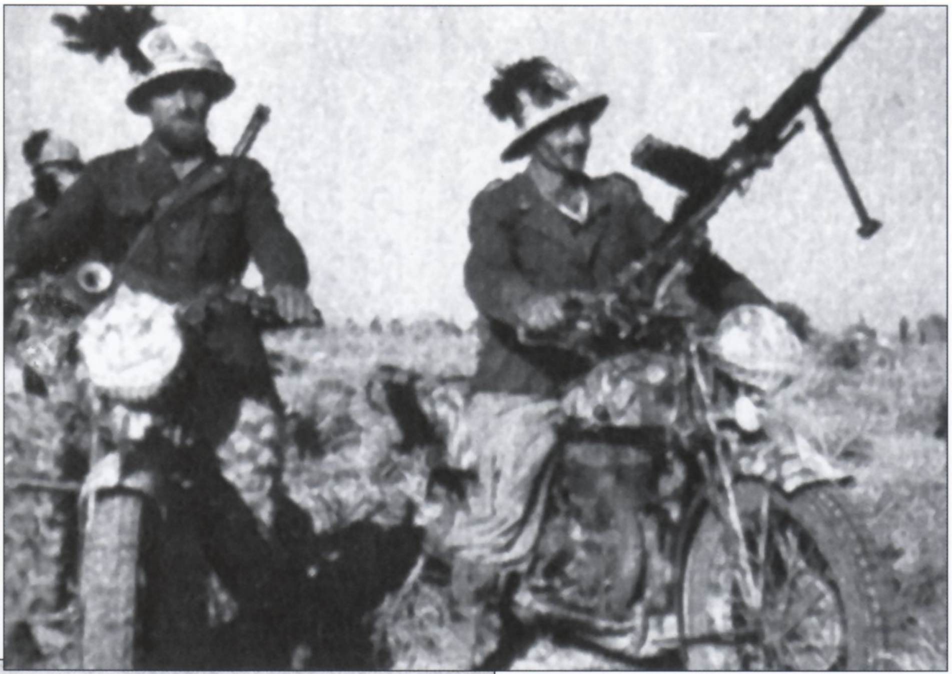


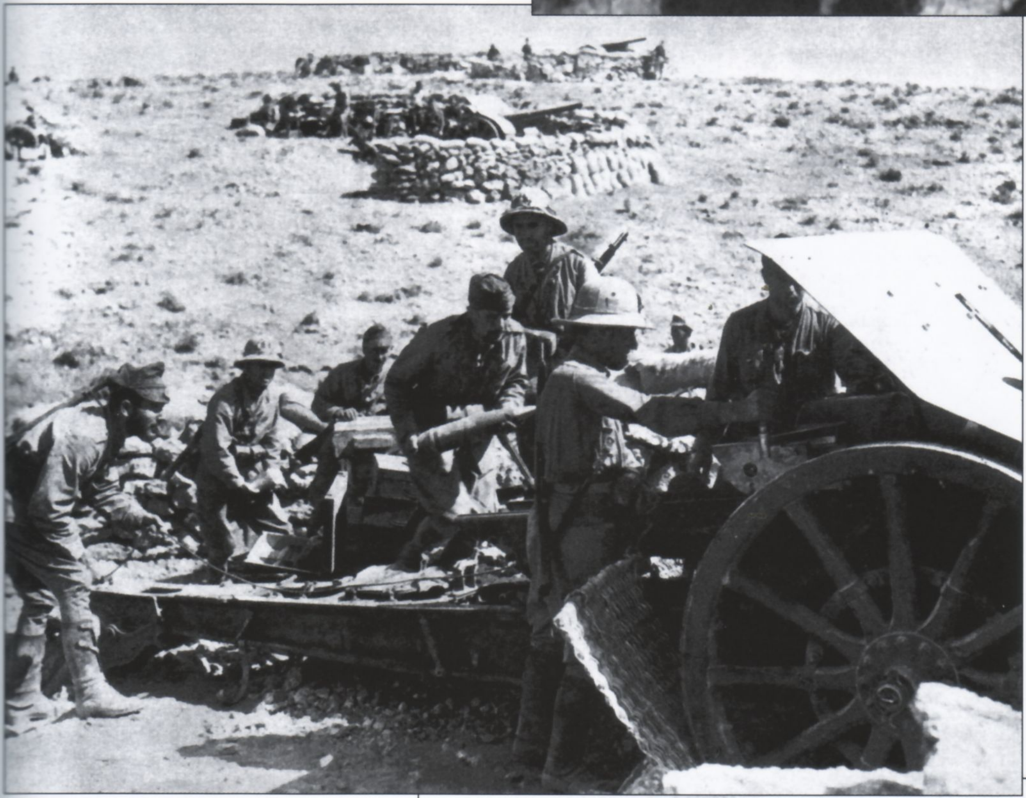
The end of the drama - the capture of General Bergonzoli (nicknamed "electric whiskers") at Beda Fomm, 1941. Bergonzoli has the regulation M35 colonial *bustina* with general's insignia. He also wears an officer's trench coat in khaki-green *gabardina*. His adjutant on the right has a gray-green greatcoat.



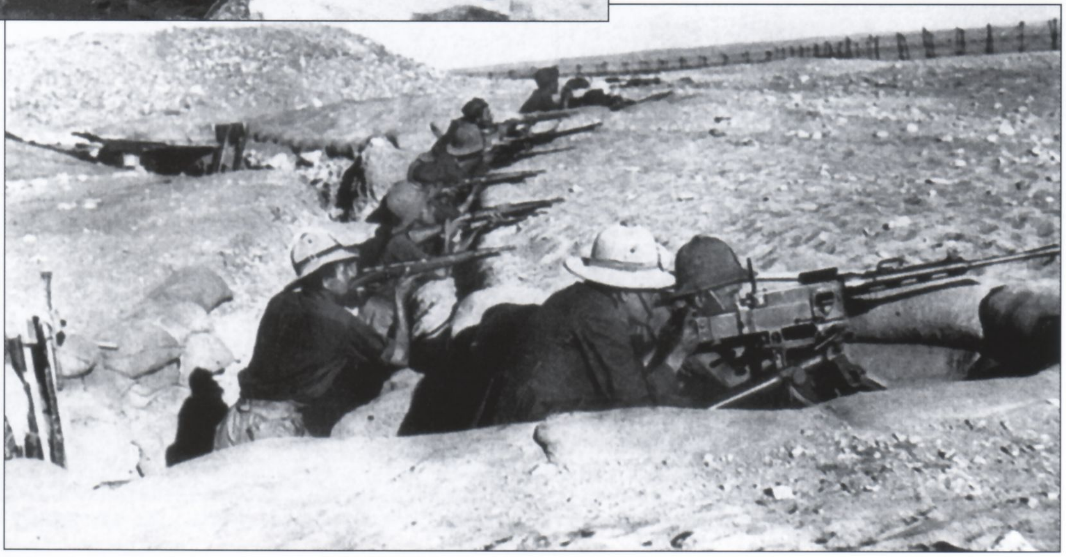
Colonel Castagna, commander of the famous Giarabub stronghold. The Libyan infantrymen of the *Gruppo Sahariano* wear *cabus-beda* turbans. March 1941. (See Plate E3)

Motorcyclist *Bersaglieri* of a *Celere* (Fast) unit. Note their camouflaged Benelli motorcycles. This photo dates from 1941. (See Plate D1)

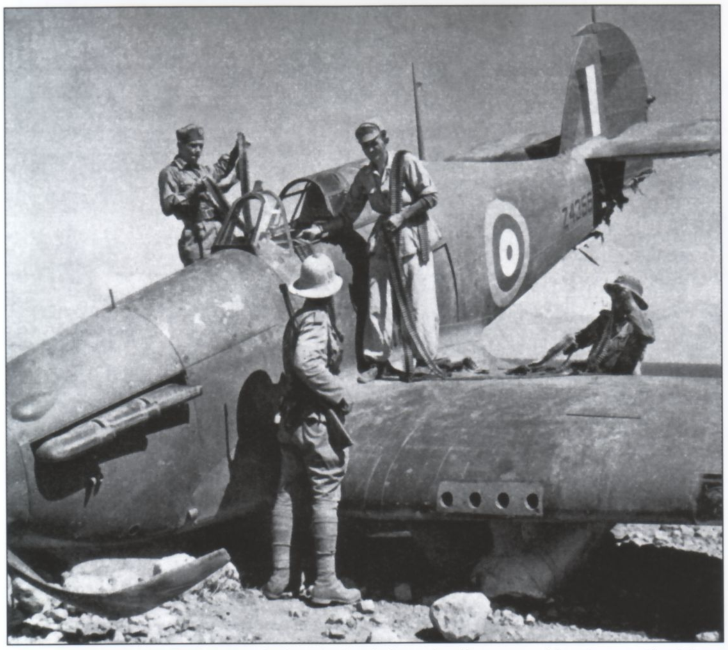




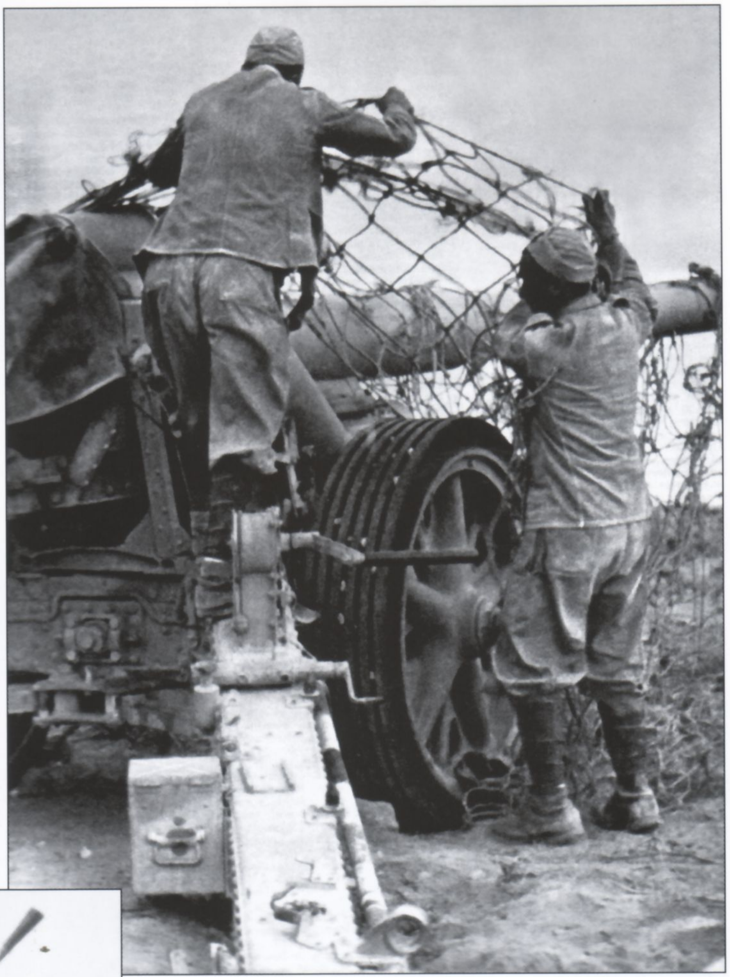
An Italian battery of divisional artillery - the soldiers are dressed in the usual combination of colonial and continental uniforms. The man on the left wears his side cap with the visor folded down. The guns are firing on Tobruk, May 1941.



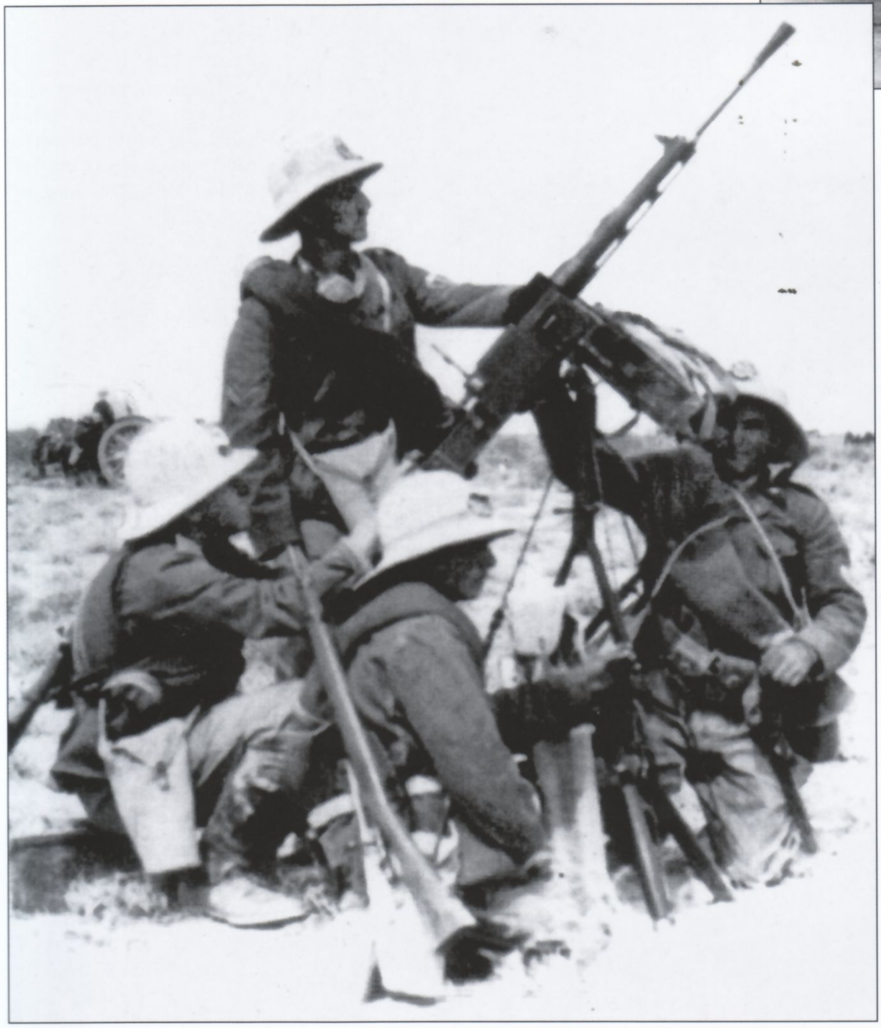
Blackshirts in a trench near the Cyrenaica border. Note the black shirts they wear. One soldier is wearing a black side cap. (See Plate A4)



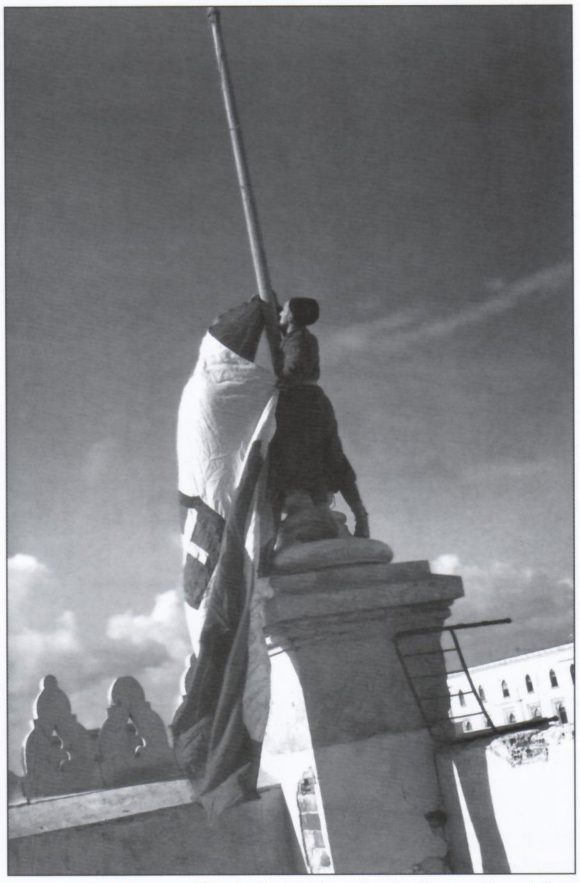
Italian airmen in their regulation colonial garb disarm a Hurricane that has been shot down.



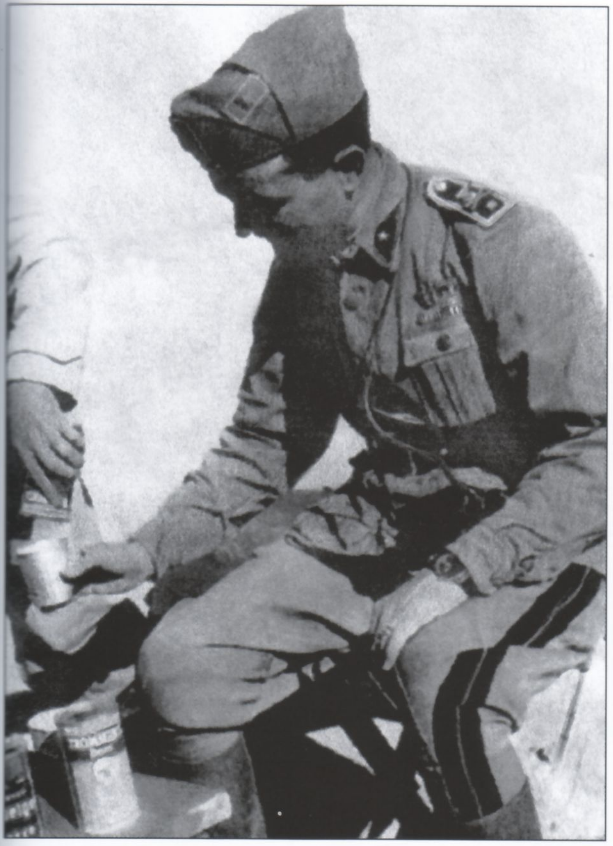
This Italian artillery crew is camouflaging their heavy field gun (perhaps a German 210mm gun) in Cyrenaica, summer 1941. The photo clearly shows the fatigue dress and side caps, plus gray-green puttees. They possibly belong to the 2nd Artillery Group, *Ariete* Division.

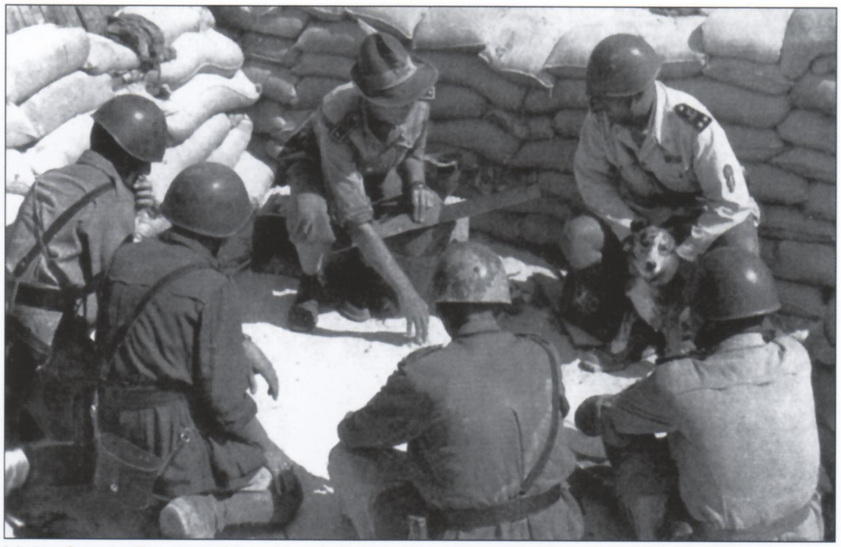


An anti-aircraft emplacement in the desert at Sollum, December 1941. The gunners are equipped with a Fiat machine gun; their attire includes standard issue rolled up brown blankets.



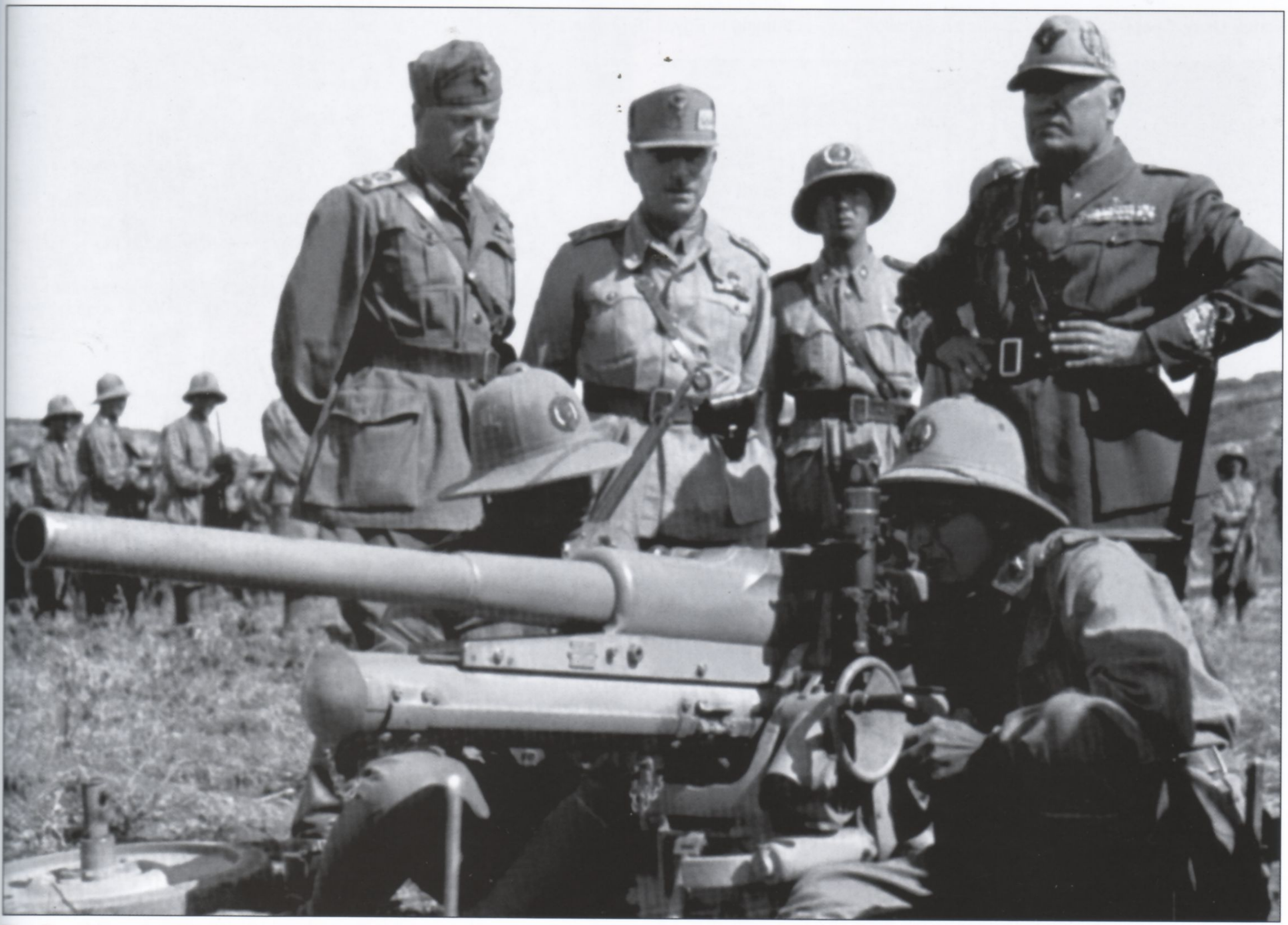
An historic shot - a Blackshirt hoists the Italian national flag in the reconquered town of Benghazi. February 1942.



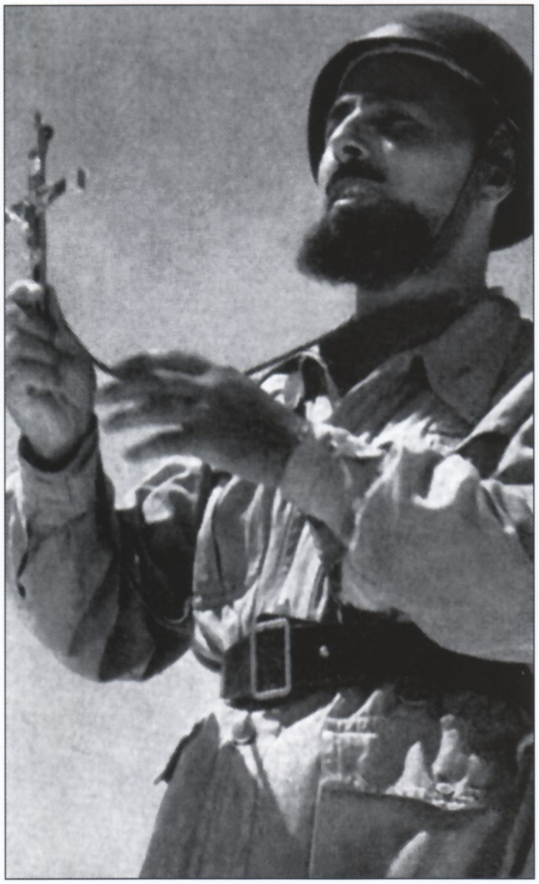


Major Caccia Dominioni has his *alpino* traditional hat. Note on the right 1st Lieutenant De Rita with a white *sahariana* bearing the *guastatori* badge on the left sleeve. Ruweisat, 1942. (See Plate F3)

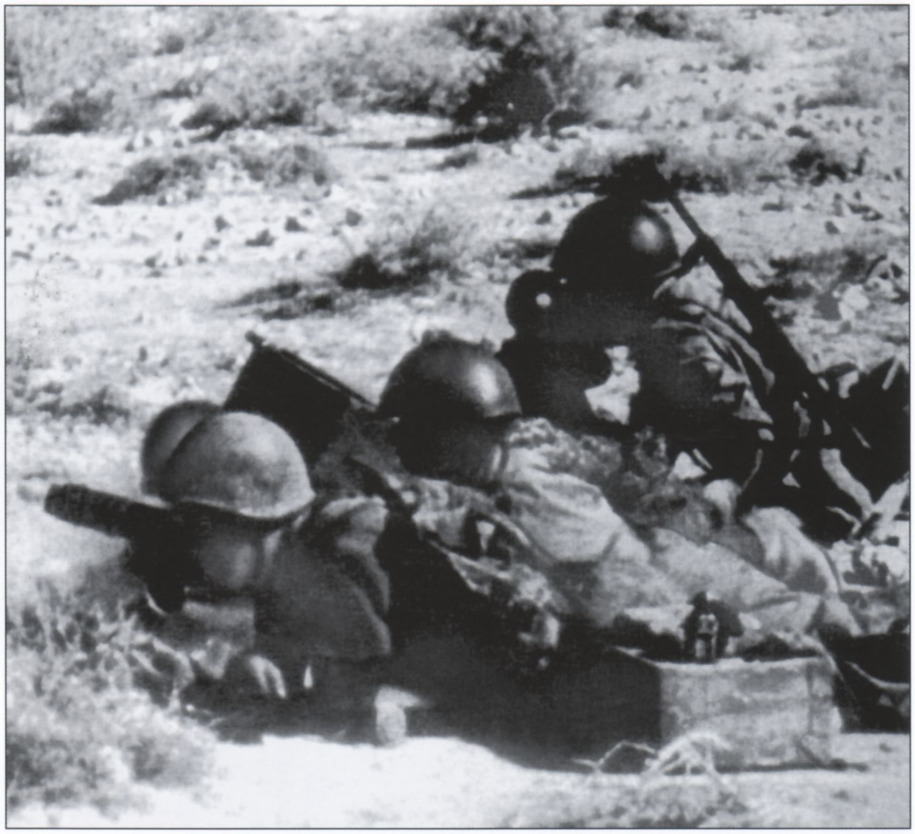
A major of the Motorized *Trieste* Artillery drinks U.S. Doelger beer looted from Tobruk. His colonial dress matches the light gray *cordellino* breeches with velvet bands. Summer 1942.



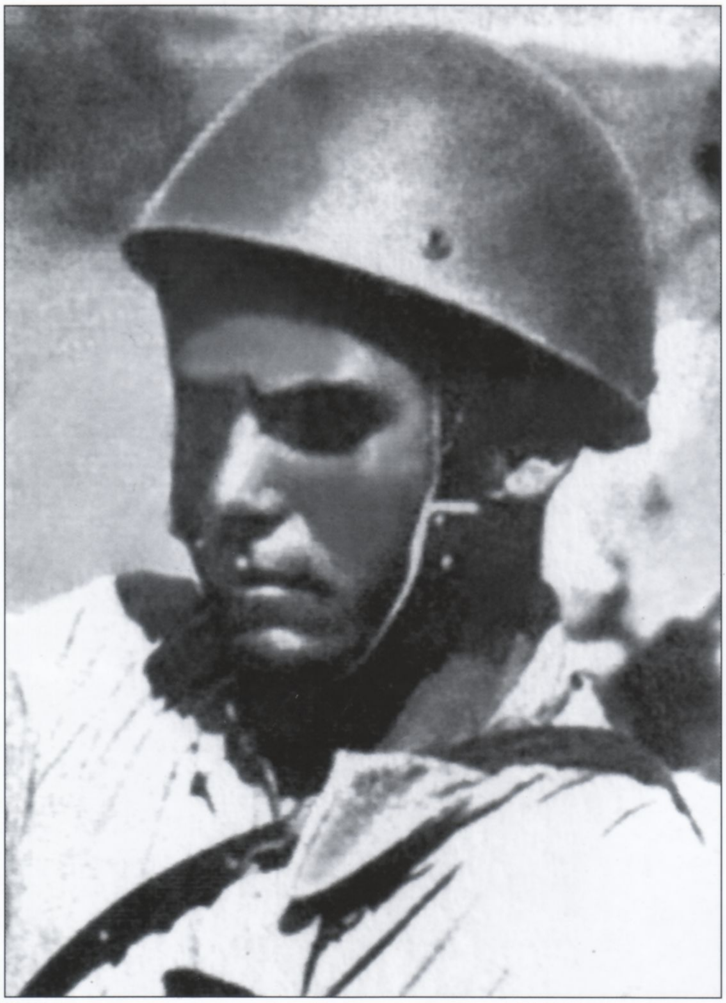
The *Duce* Mussolini visits the *Trento* Division: he sports a complete dark olive uniform. Visible in the background are Generals Barbasetti and Bastico. Mersa Matruh, June 1942.



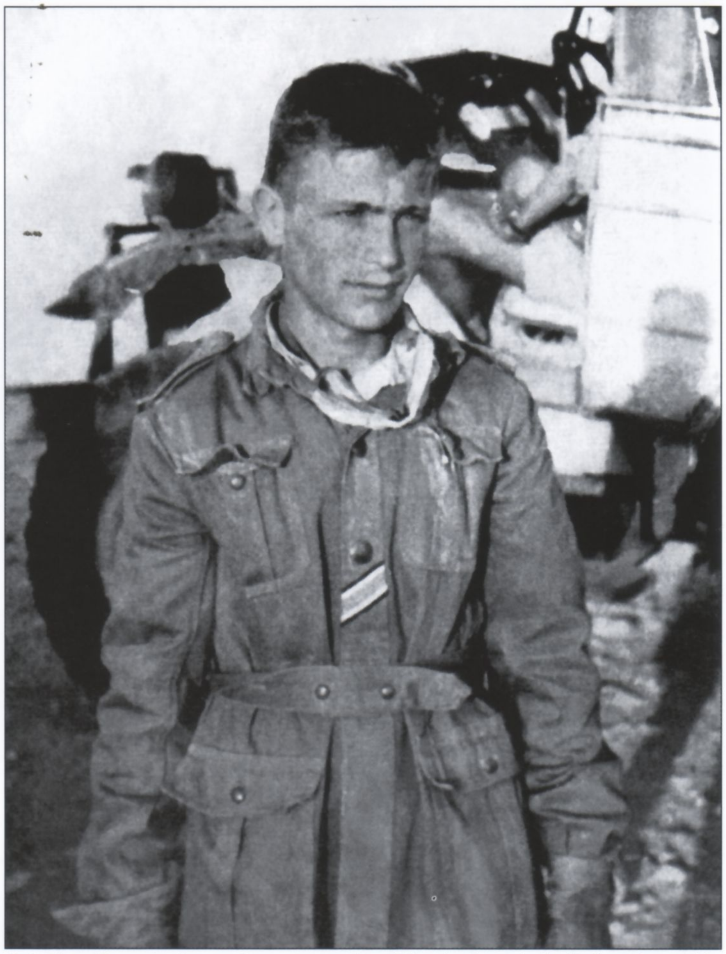
Father Usay, Chaplain of XXXI *Guastatori* Battalion.



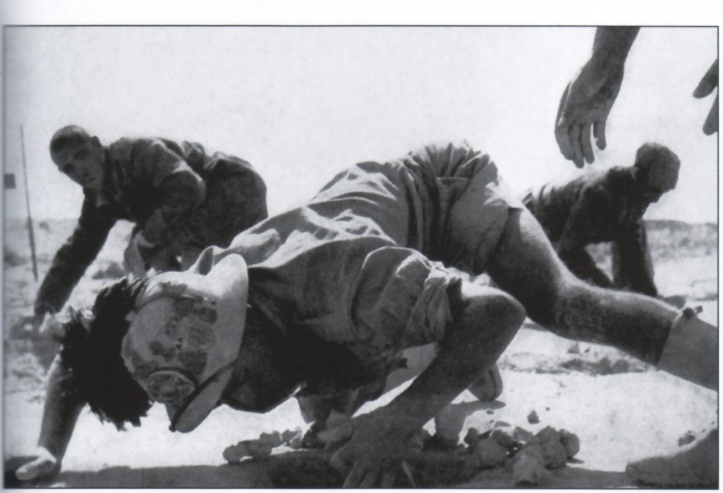
Italian assault engineers or *Guastatori* handling a Brixia 45mm mortar. Note the gray-green helmets camouflaged with mud, and the military cameraman in the background. This is assault training in Egypt 1942. (See Plate F1)



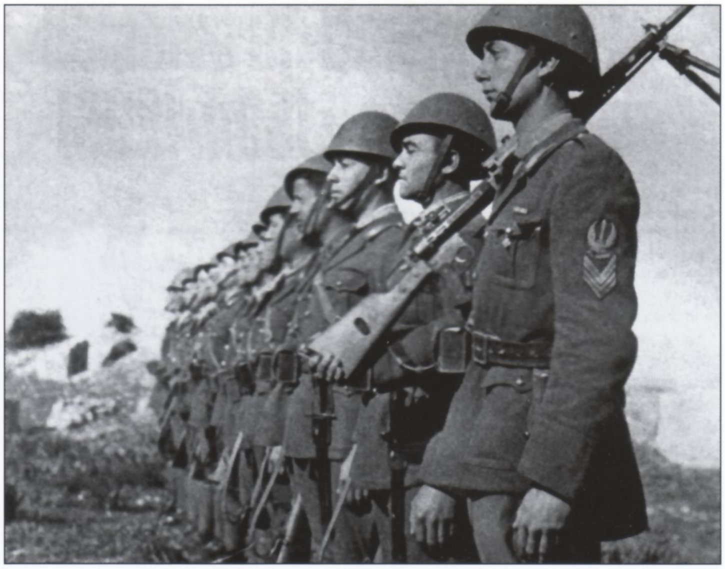
A *Folgore* paratrooper wearing the gray-green special M42 helmet with no badge, and a khaki shirt. El Alamein, 1942.



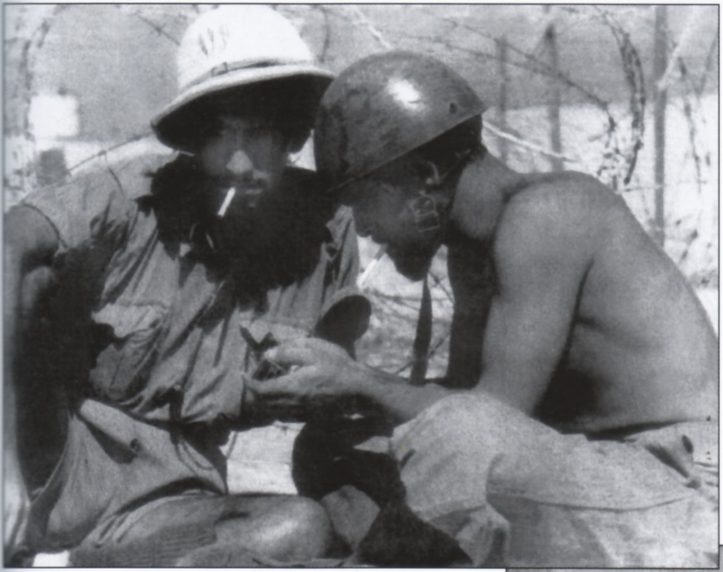
Artigliere Bresciani was the youngest soldier in the whole Italian Army. He enlisted in the *Celere* Artillery Regiment. Note his German 2nd Class Iron Cross ribbon. *Artigliere* Bresciani was shot in 1942 when he was just seventeen years old!



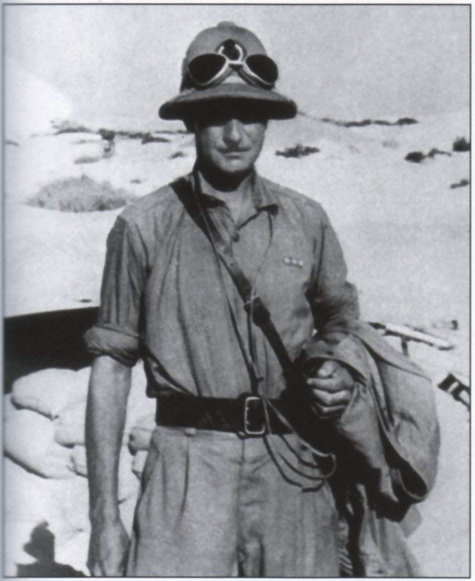
Bersaglieri carefully searching for mines along the El Alamein line. Apparent is the captured South African topee with regalia.



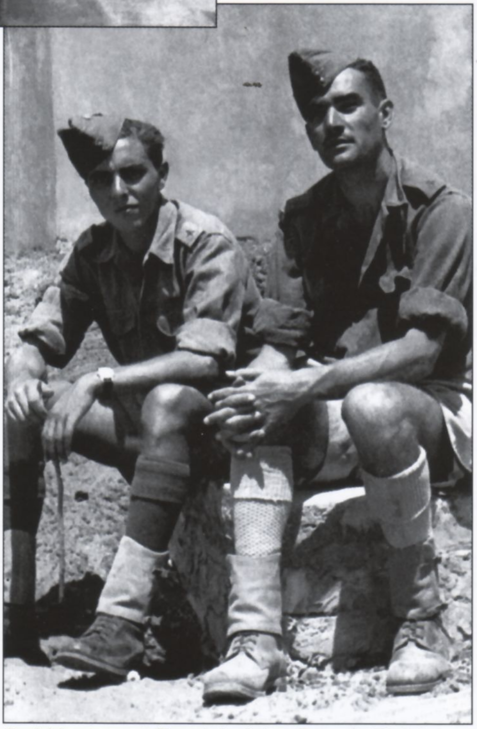
Airmen of the Italian Air Force's *Loreto* Battalion. Take note of the badge on the sleeve and the Czech helmet. This shot was taken before their departure for the Tunisian front. Sicily, 1943. (See Plate H1)



Two *Folgore* prisoners end their African War after going into captivity. The soldier on the right wears an M1942 gray-green airborne helmet while his comrade has a whitened sun helmet with hand-drawn badge. The photo was taken in late 1942. (See Plate G2)

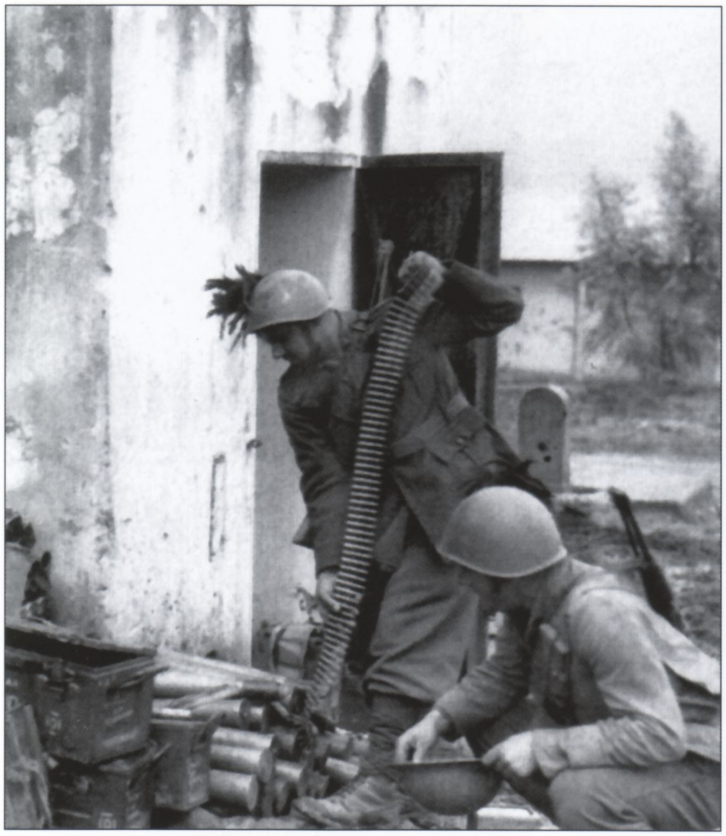


An oft-reproduced photo of Captain Ruspoli Prince of Poggio Suasa (who won a gold Military Medal for Valor at El Alamein). Note the badge on the front of the topee, which is of other-ranks pattern, and the rank stars on the breast.

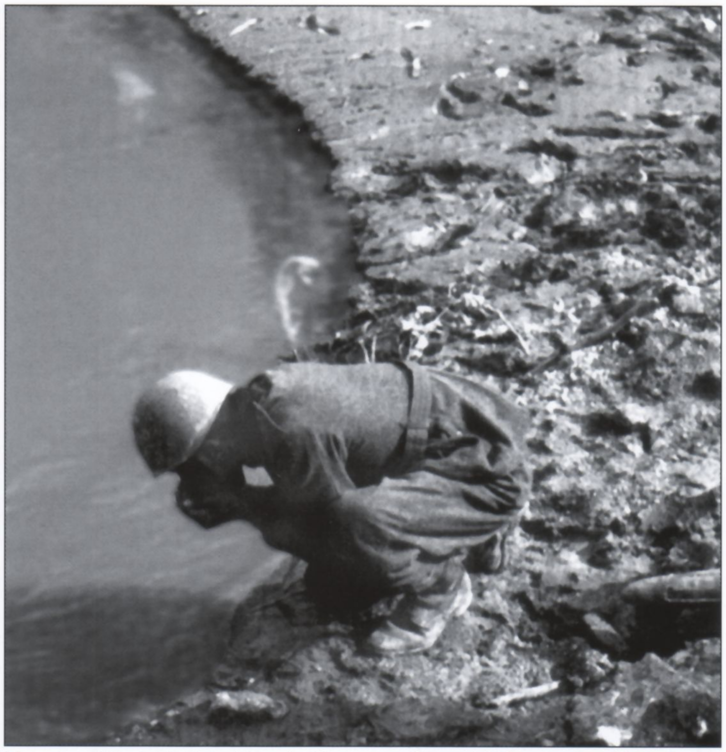


2nd Lieutenant Rossini of the *Brescia* Division at El Alamein (in the fall of 1942). This photo proves how Italians wore Commonwealth khaki drill, U.S. herringbone shirts, web anklets and even khaki drab side caps. The rank stars on the slip-on shoulder tabs were often drawn with pen or copying pencil. (Dr. V. Rossini's private collection)

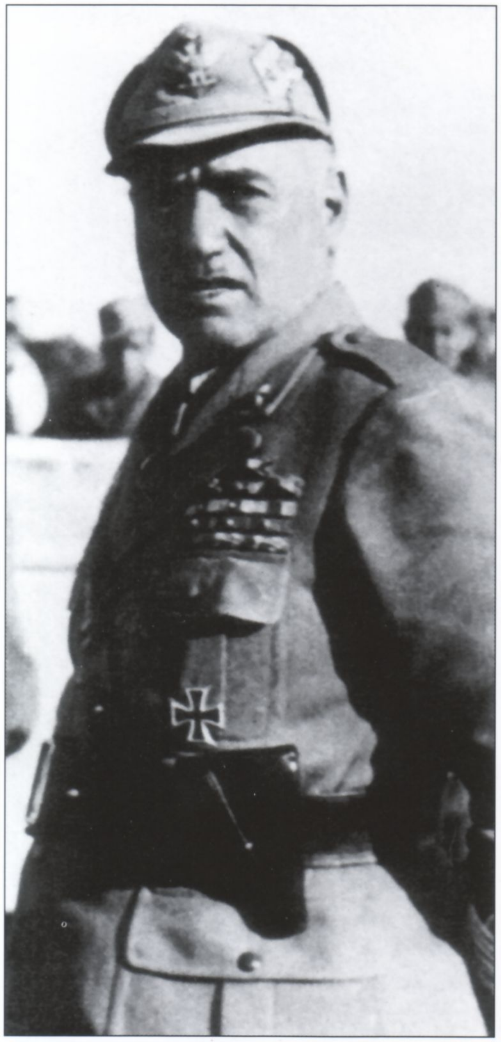
Captured in the desert, a paratrooper wears the M29 *bustina* (Airborne pattern) and gray-green greatcoat with *Folgore* collar patches. Early November 1942.



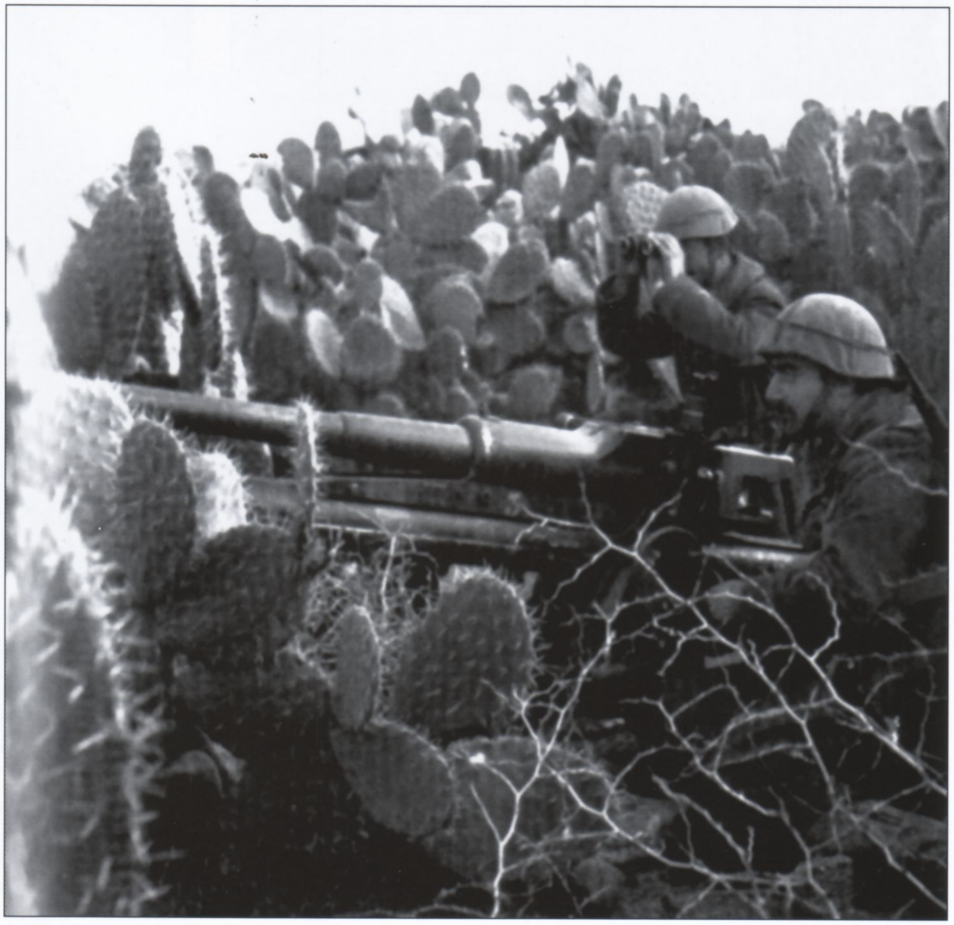
Bersaglieri of the *Centauro* Division recover precious Allied ammunition. They wear modified *Baistrocchi* M1942 continental uniforms. Tunisia, 1943.



Here is a thirsty Italian driver in blue overalls and helmet camouflaged with sand. Tunisia, 1943.



General Messe in his colonial dress. Tunisia, 1943. (See Plate D3)



Artillerymen of the 5th Regiment, *Superga* Division. They have covered their helmets with sandbag canvas. Tunisia, late spring 1943.

GERMAN FORCES

PLATE J1. Armorer Sergeant (*Waffenfeldwebel*), 2nd Machine Gun Battalion (*Maschinengewehr-Bataillon* 2), Tripoli, 1941

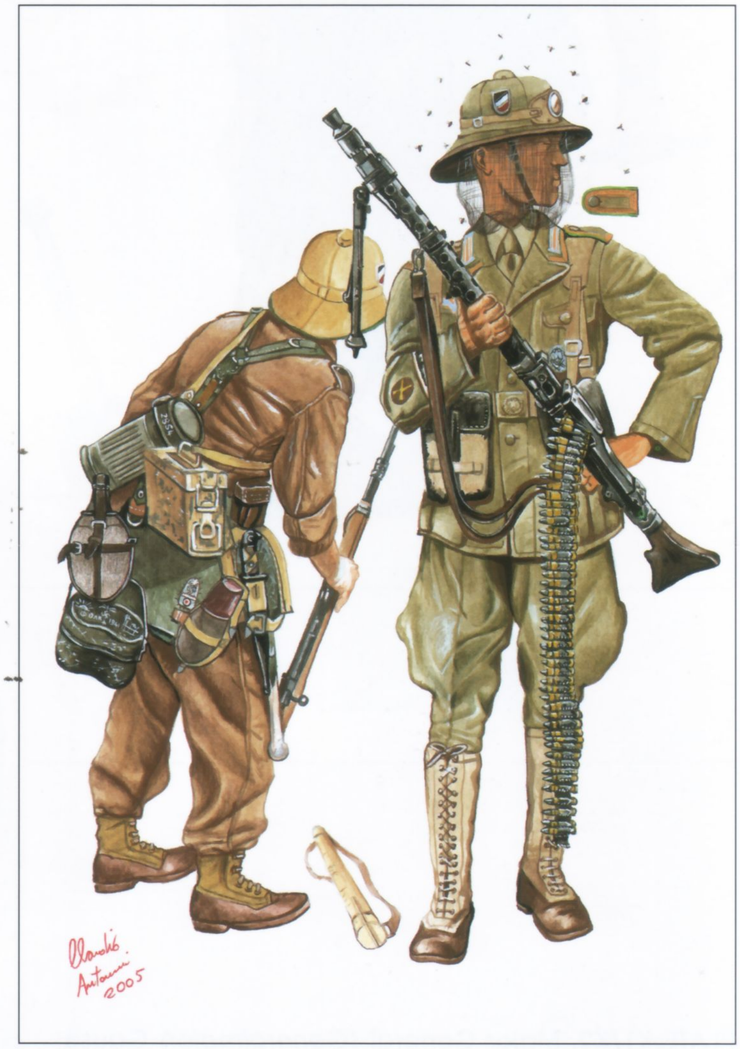
The figure has a newly issued tropical M1940 *Afrika* dress, recently ordered from the Tropical Institute of Hamburg. At first the tropical uniform was quite complete with a shirt and tie; the buttons were of "knurled type" and painted in olive green. Uniforms were of a sage green or olive green color, but a tan-brown version also existed.

New badges were introduced for the tropical dress - a light blue-gray machine woven *Bevo* design on an ochre or tan background. The NCO braid, or *Tresse,* was also in ochre. The M1940 tropical helmet was made of cork covered with canvas. A metallic shield bearing the national colors was pinned on the right side (as in our figure), whilst on the left side there was the *Heer* eagle shield (see Plate O2). A second tropical helmet made of sand-colored canvas was later issued (see the background figure in the plate). The tropical breeches were always matched with M1940 early pattern tropical boots, being especially made in sturdy canvas and brown leather. The continental black leather boots, although worn in North Africa, tended to crack in the heat. Therefore, ankle boots were soon adopted (see the background figure).

As 1st Gunner, our *Waffenfeldwebel* is equipped with a pistol and spare pouch holding a cleaning sponge, while his trade badge is sewn on the right cuff. A *DAK* belt buckle in olive green color is just visible. In this plate, both figures have the light green *Waffenfarbe* of machine gunners on their shoulder straps.

The background figure sports the equipment of a 2nd Gunner: canvas Y-straps, tropical bread bag, entrenching tool with bayonet, and gasmask case (which was left in continental olive green - see also Plate M1), and two water bottles. This latter piece of equipment was covered with gray or brown felt to help keep the water fresh. The aluminum cups were finished in olive green or black, or they were made in black or light green bakelite. A celluloid-impregnated wooden bottle was also issued, whilst Luftwaffe personnel had a blue-gray cup too. The main figure displays the superb MG34 light machine gun, a quick-firing 7.92mm weapon, while the 2nd Gunner carries two ammunition boxes. A metal case for two spare barrels is placed on the ground.

Note the mosquito net under the tropical helmet, copied from a rare DAK color photograph. Among the first things Germans encountered in Africa were the hot climate, sunburn, dust and flies!



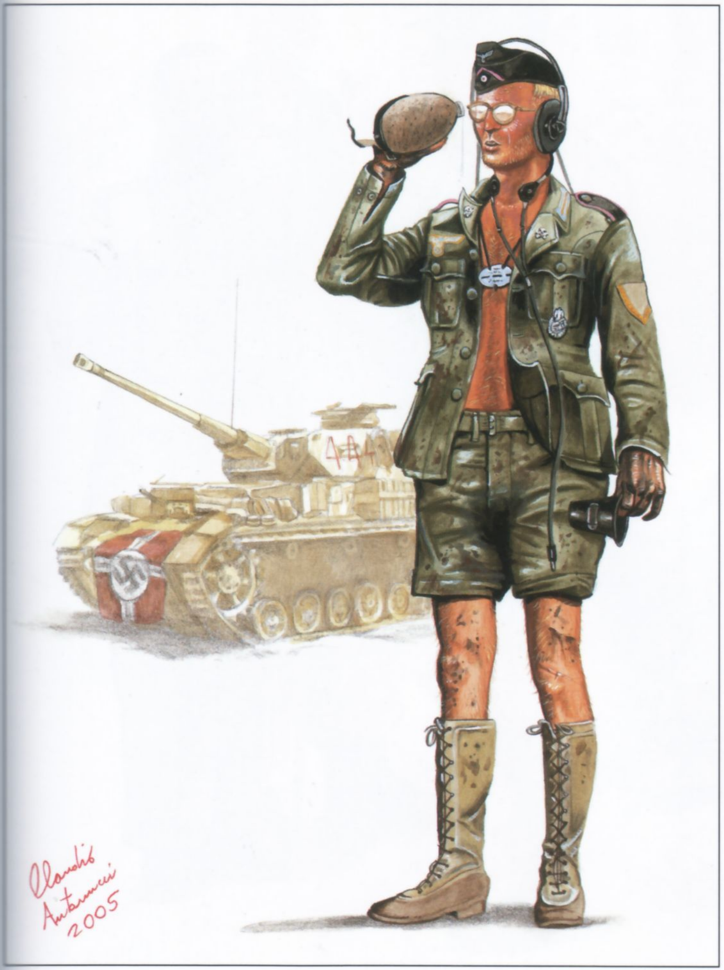


PLATE J2. Lance Corporal (*Gefreiter*), 15th Panzer Division, 1941-42

The life of tank crews in the desert was very hard. The temperature inside armored vehicles was scarcely bearable, the gun's smoke was acrid, the tank bounced over uneven terrain, and fire was a common danger.

This olive green uniform is rather dirty with oil and soot. It exposes the DAK dog tag composed of two parts: if the owner was killed, one would be snapped off and taken by the commander while the second part was left hanging around the deceased's neck. The traditional black *Feldmütze* was often retained by armored units, as were the Panzer troops' shoulder straps with pink piping . Note the characteristic metallic skulls on the tunic's lapels. The silver Panzer battle badge is on the left breast pocket. Note the *Funkhaube A* headphones of this tank radio operator.

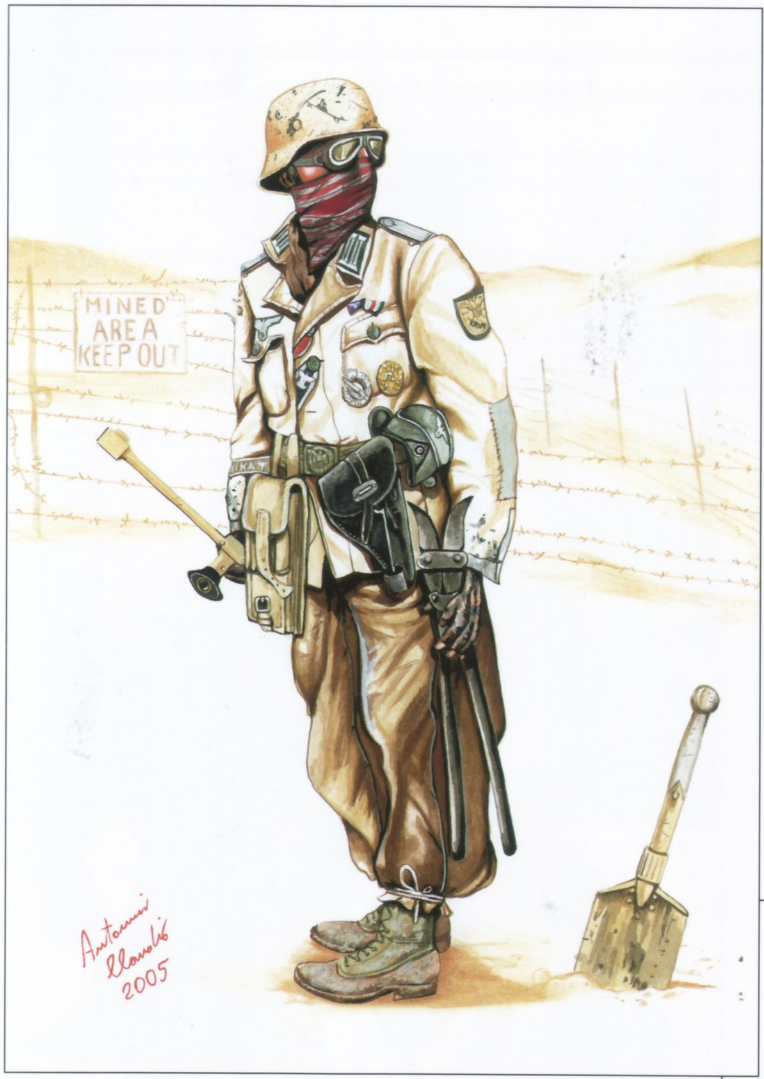


PLATE J3. 2nd Lieutenant (*Leutnant*), Rommel's Pioneer Command, 1942-43

Our plate illustrates well the real "smell" of a German officer in the desert! The M1942 tropical tunic with plain pockets is faded and washed to a "bone white" color (to use the words of a *Panzerarmee Afrika* veteran). Decorations include the Krim shield, the infantry assault badge, the wounded badge in bronze, ribbon of 2nd Class Iron Cross, and ribbon of confirmation of the 1939 Iron Cross. The M35 helmet is camouflaged with a rough coat of khaki paint, with sand mixed in.

Observe the U.S. sun goggles which are war booty. These and the scarf are items observable in contemporary photographs. They protected the wearer from the desert windstorms, or *ghibli*. Note the discolored ribbons of the Italian-German war medal and long service medal.

Frequently, soldiers chose the more practical M1940 tropical trousers rather than the M1940 breeches (see Plate J1). A string secured the trousers to the ankle so as to avoid the ingress of the pervasive sand. Short tropical boots in leather and canvas are matched to such trousers. The *Leutnant* has his continental M1934 side cap tucked into the *Panzerarmee Afrika* enlisted man's belt. Note the engineers' black *Soutache Waffenfarbe*. The personal equipment of this officer comprises a periscope, a sand-colored map case (originally in black leather), a pair of wire cutters, and a flare pistol (*Leuchtpistole*). The entrenching tool visible on the right was used to search for mines and to cover up products of bodily functions in the field, often called a *Spatengang*, or "spade errand"!

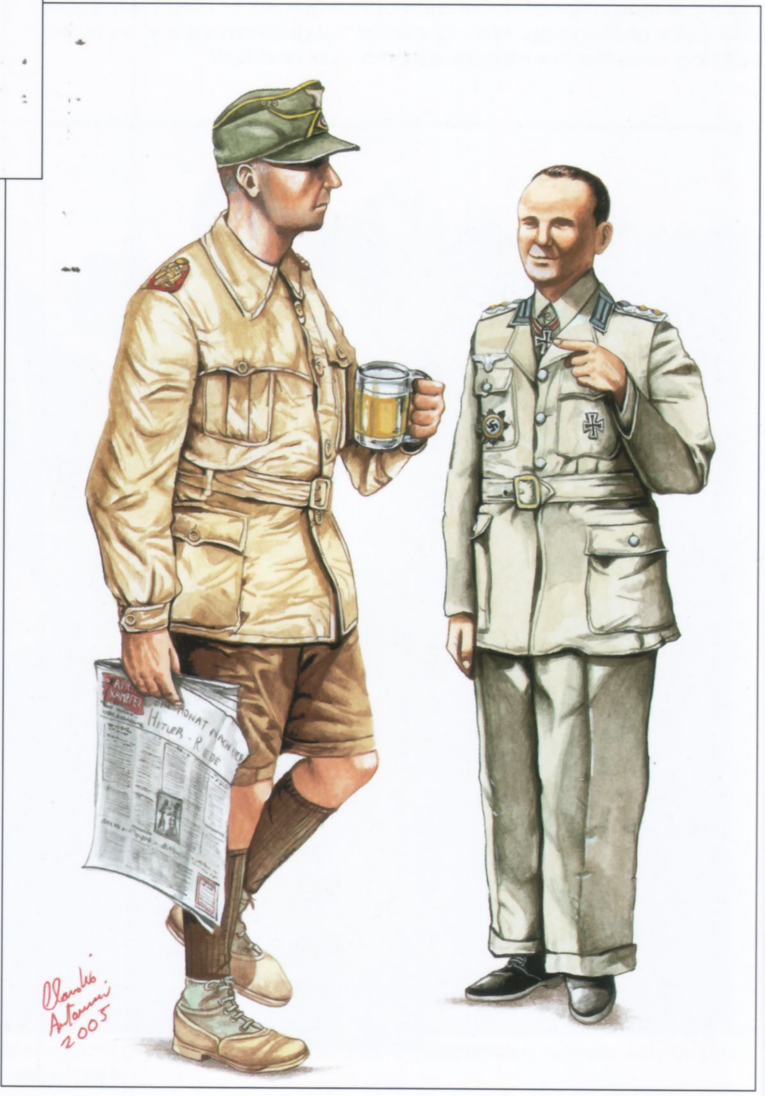


PLATE K1/K2. Major General (*Generalmajor*) Gause; Colonel (*Oberst*) Westphal, 1941-42

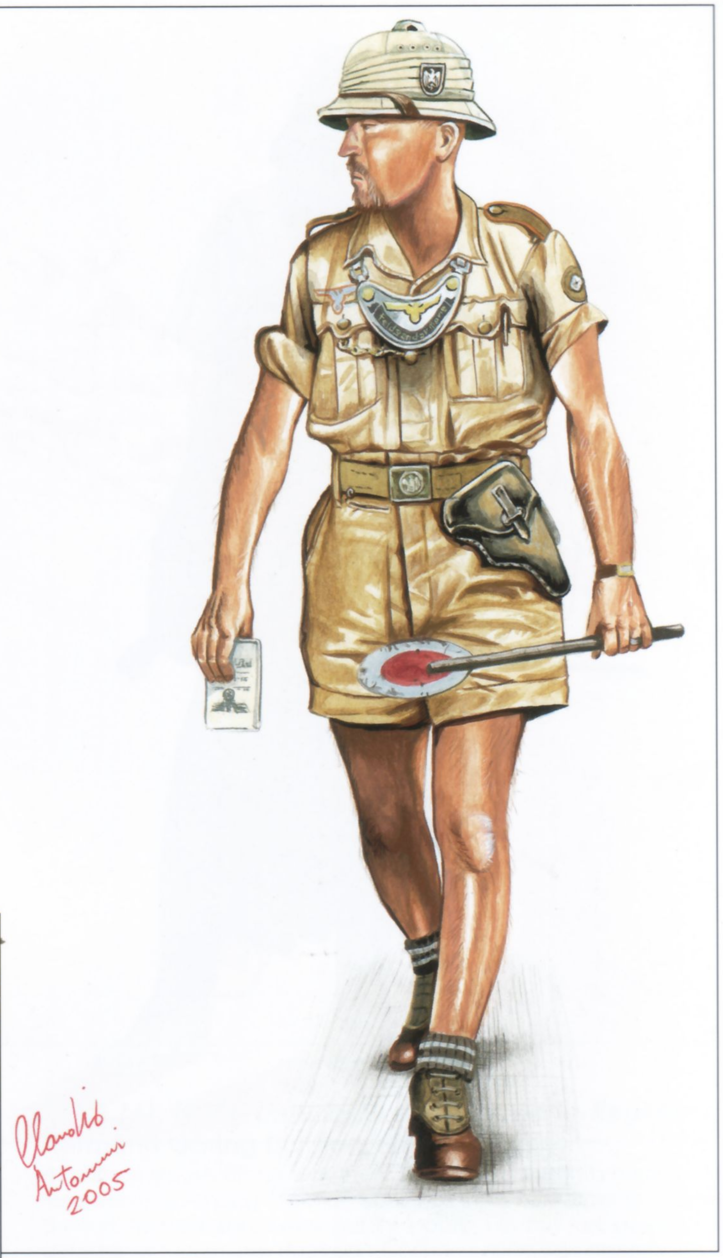
As Rommel's Chief of Staff, Gause became very close to the Desert Fox. In this image he wears a practical desert combination, and his General's regalia identify him as a DAK commander. Among the identifying features is the gold piping on the *Feldmütze*.

The Italian *sahariana* appears rather crumpled and basic. The newspaper of Major General Gause is the British propaganda paper "*Afrika Kämpfer*" (Africa Fighter). *Oberst* Westphal, Rommel's very capable operations officer, wears a comfortable tailored British bush jacket made of khaki drill cotton, and long matching trousers. His insignia is also minimal: shoulder straps of an infantry colonel, silver Nazi Eagle pinned on the right breast, silver German Cross, Knight's Cross and 1st Class Iron Cross on the left breast pocket. Note also the M1935 continental collar patches, or *Litzen*.

PLATE K3. Private, 1st Class (*Oberwachtmann*), Field Police (*Feldgendarmerie*), 1941-43

Wartime demands increased the need to simplify greatly dress regulations issued in 1939, so they were no longer applied to the *Afrika-Korps* and *Panzerarmee Afrika*. Steady supplies of fuel, ammunition and food were the main priorities of Rommel's army, not uniforms.

This *Feldgendarm* is patrolling in a Libyan town and wears the famous South African pith helmet with German pins. His regulation shirt is of pullover pattern and has a DAK eagle, shoulder straps, and tropical rank chevron. The *DAK* shorts, or *kurze Hose,* were officially forbidden for active service, and they should have been used only with the impractical M1940 high boots (see Plate O1). The men greatly preferred these tropical ankle boots, and even cut down their high lacing boots! Note the special-duty gorget with luminous insignia (see also Plate M2).



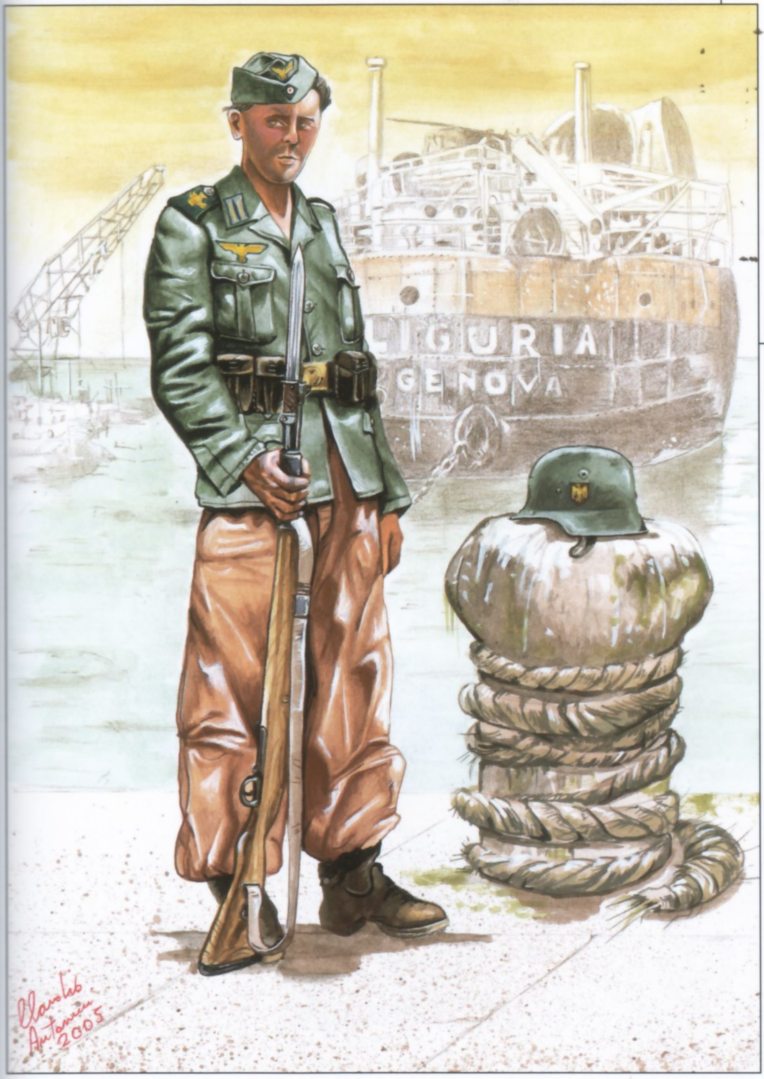


PLATE K4. Coastal gunner (Marineartillerist), *Kriegsmarine*, Port of Tobruk, 1941-42

Naval personnel performed police duty in ports, naval bases, and depots. Naval supply was a vital part of Rommel's desert warfare strategy. Coastal Artillery, Marine Battalions and Land-Based Naval Troops adopted a field gray service uniform, although it had gold insignia and buttons with the navy anchor. Note the shoulder straps of this Seaman in dark green cloth with Naval Artillery badge.

Tropical garments were also issued in pinkish-tan fine cotton. In Libya the *Kriegsmarine* used dark blue "boarding" side caps and white summer garments with cornflower blue insignia. *Heer* leather equipment and marching boots were employed too, while the rifle is the usual Kar 98k. Note the M35 helmet with golden naval Nazi Eagle.

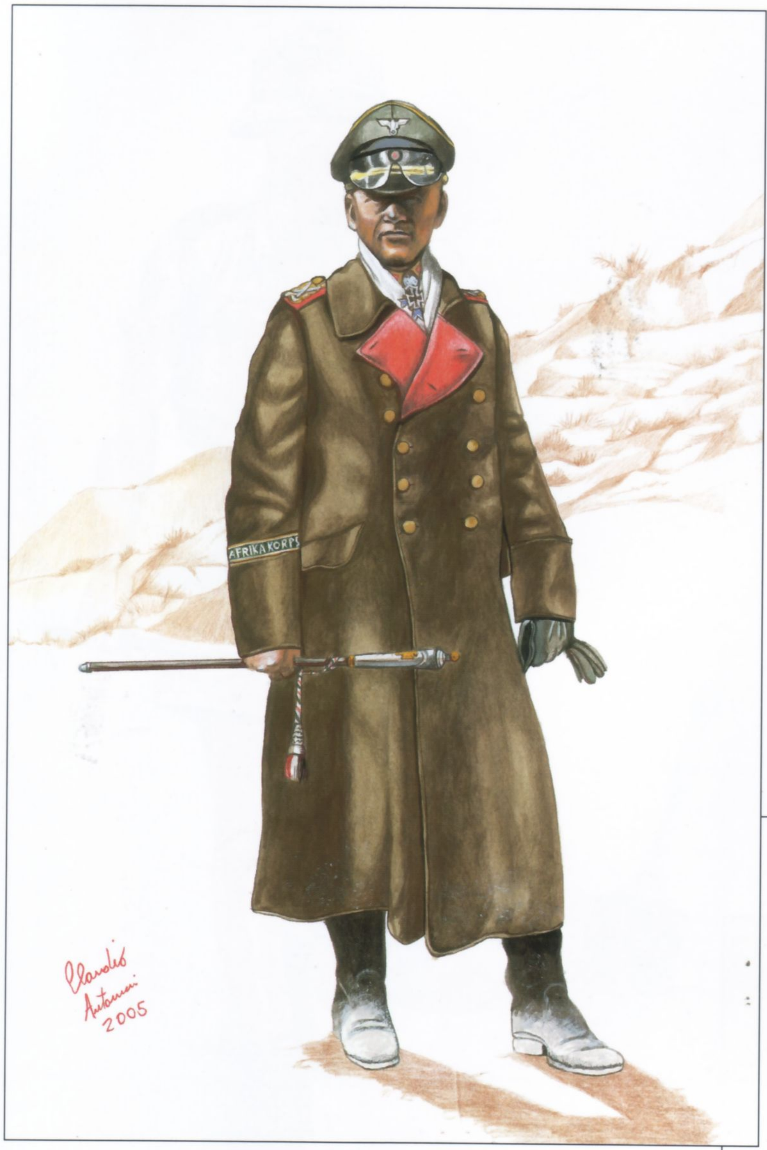


PLATE L1. Field Marshal (*Generalfeldmarschall*) Rommel, Tunisia, 1943

The famous Desert Fox chose a useful "African" outfit. Among the several items used by Rommel was the ubiquitous peaked cap (*Schirmmütze*) in gray-green cloth with general's gold piping. In bad weather, Rommel wore a brown-olive greatcoat with red velvet lapels, according to the rank of a general.

When the Führer appointed Rommel as *Feldmarschall* in June 1942, he gave him the interlaced shoulder straps with crossed batons. In the figure we can see the everyday version of the Marshal's baton. High cavalry boots and suede gloves complete the uniform. The Desert Fox did not like a great range of insignia. Note on his neck the special Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords. Rommel earned his Pour le Mérite medal during WWI at Caporetto, against the Italian Army!

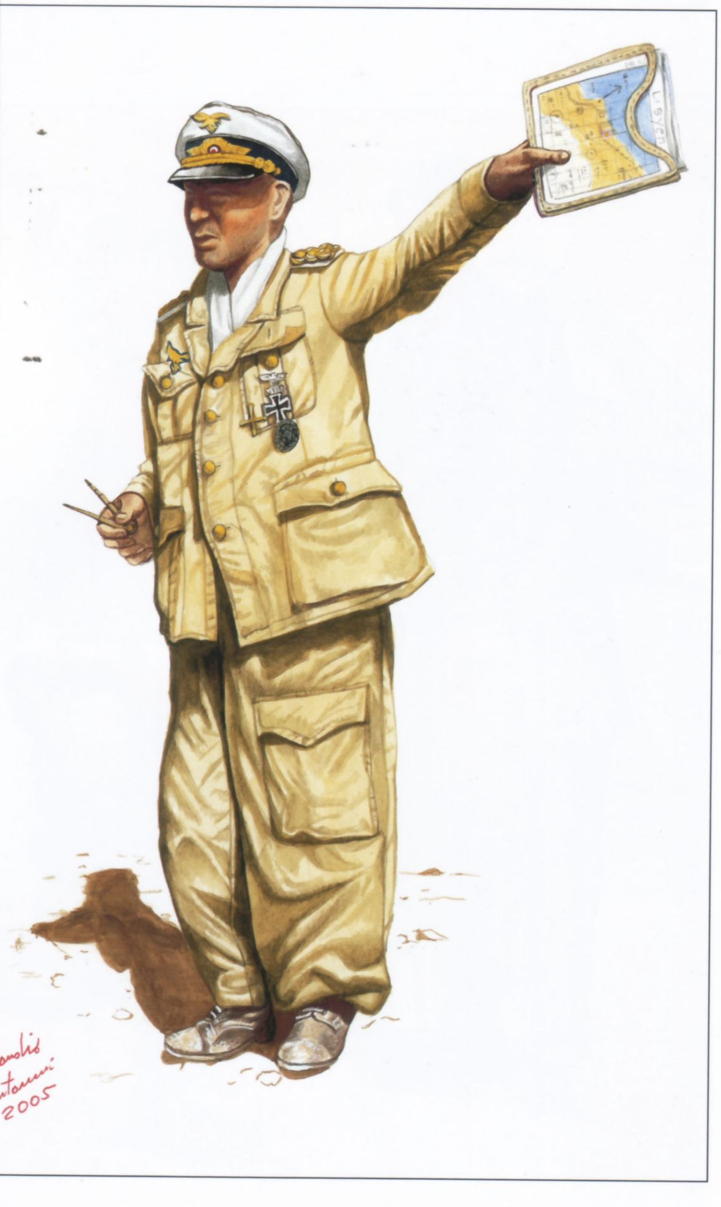


PLATE L2. Major General (*Generalmajor*) Ramcke, El Alamein, 1942

Ramcke was one of the most famous German commanders in Africa. As a Colonel of Airborne Troops, he had been a key commander in Crete in 1941. In North Africa, Major General Ramcke led the *Fallschirmjäger Brigade* named in his honor.

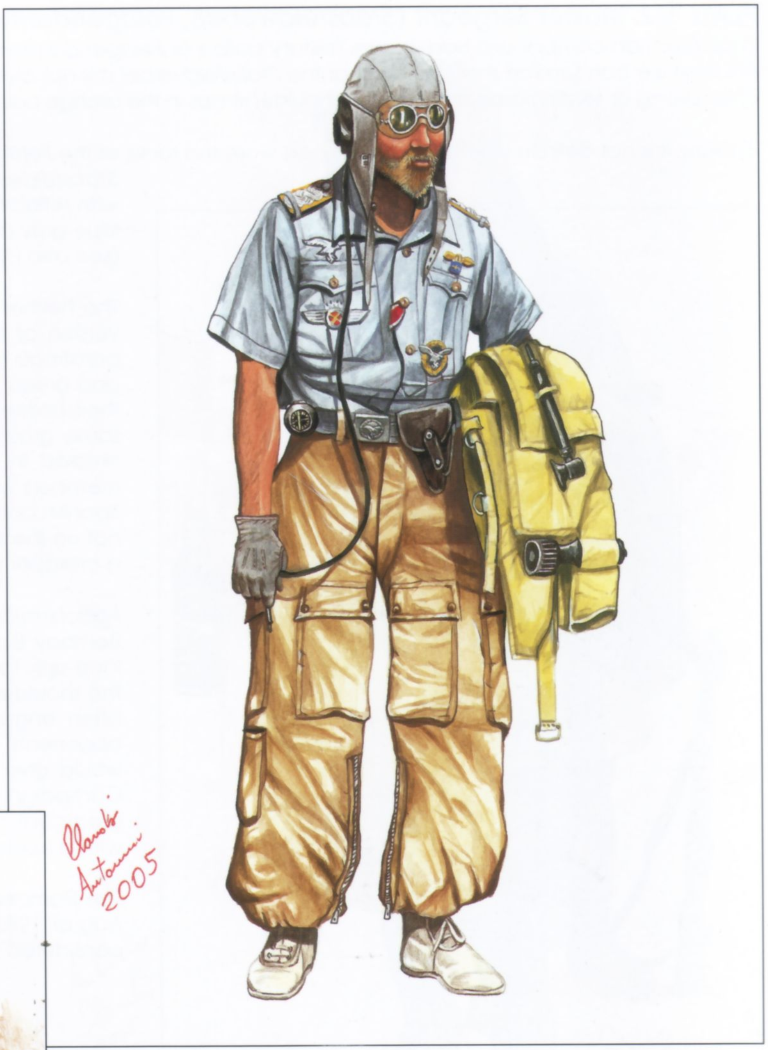
Described as short, active and nervous, Ramcke dressed in informal tropical garb or *Tropenanzug*. The Luftwaffe General's peaked cap, or *Schirmmütze*, is provided with a white summer cover. Note the shoulder boards of a *Fallschirmjäger Generalmajor* on his simple tropical tunic; they are interlaced in silver-gold thread on white *Waffenfarbe*. His insignia include the 1939 Iron Cross 1st Class, bar to the Iron Cross 1st Class, Black Wound Badge, and WWI Baltic Cross.

PLATE L3. Hauptmann Marseille, 1st Group (*I Gruppe*), Fighter Squadron 27 (*Jagdgeschwader* 27), Libya, 1941-42

The famous *Jagdgeschwader* 27 of the German ace, Hans-Joachim Marseille, fought with bravery against the RAF. Sadly *Hauptmann* Marseille was accidentally killed in his Messerschmitt Bf-109 E4/N over the desert on 30 September 1942.

The pilot sports a light canvas flying helmet, of which there was also a tan version. The DAK *Zeiss-Umbral* goggles were considered of lower quality than the Luftwaffe pattern. Unusually, this pilot also proudly displays on his tropical *blue-gray* shirt his decorations: ribbon of the 2nd Class Iron Cross, Pilot's Badge, wings of the *Legion Condor* (Spanish Civil War), Nazi Luftwaffe Eagle in machine-embroidered design, Operational Flying Clasp (over the left breast pocket), and the interlaced shoulder straps of a Luftwaffe Hauptmann.

The special "Channel-trousers" (*Kanalhose*) in tropical cotton were fitted with large pockets to hold survival equipment in case of ditching into the sea. The *Luftwaffe* tropical belt holds an altimeter and a PPK pistol as personal armament. Sneakers and suede gloves were also worn. Note the life jacket in yellow canvas carried for air rescue in the sea. This life jacket with oxygen cylinder was an essential garment for Axis aircrew operating over the Mediterranean.



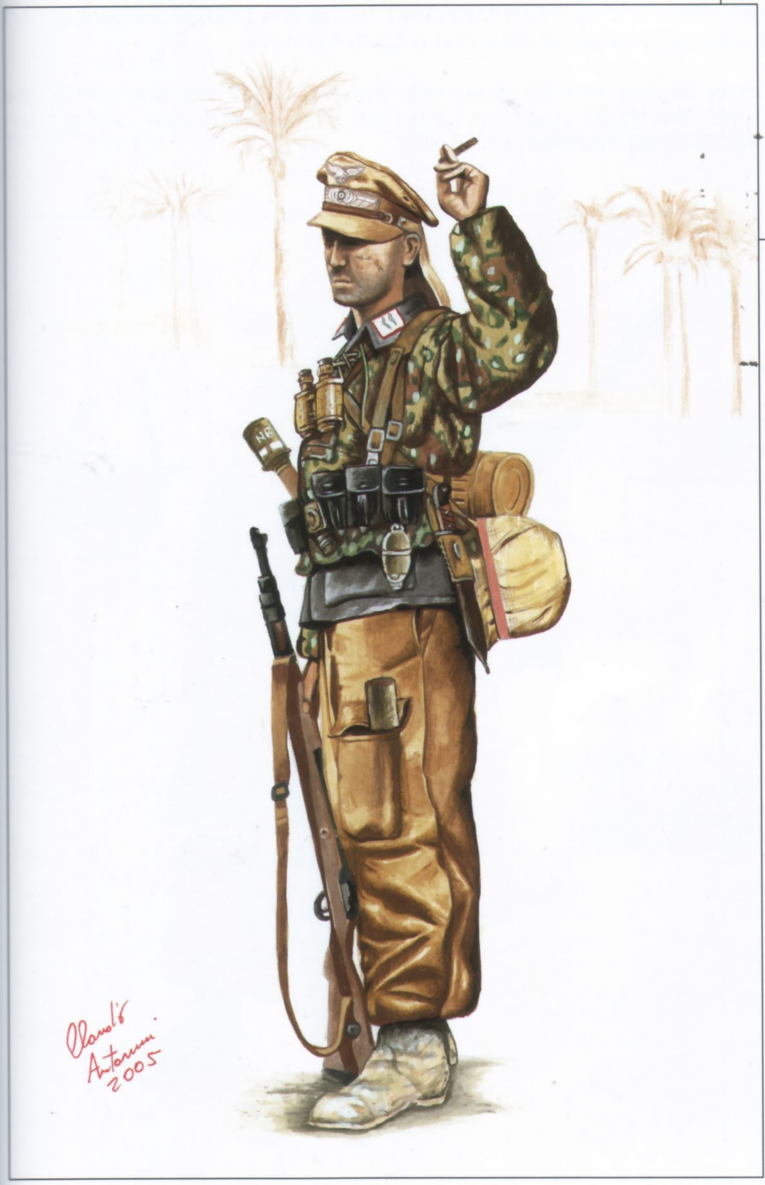


PLATE M1. NCO (*Unterfeldwebel*), *Artillerie-Regiment*, Hermann Göring Division, Tunisia, 1943

At various stages of the war, the Luftwaffe organized a number of field divisions. Among these divisions was the elite Hermann Göring Division. Its battalions were put into action in the last desperate defense of Tunisia. The Hermann Göring Division was organized as an autonomous, motorized and armored unit (equipped with the powerful *Sturmgeschütz III Ausf. F/8*).

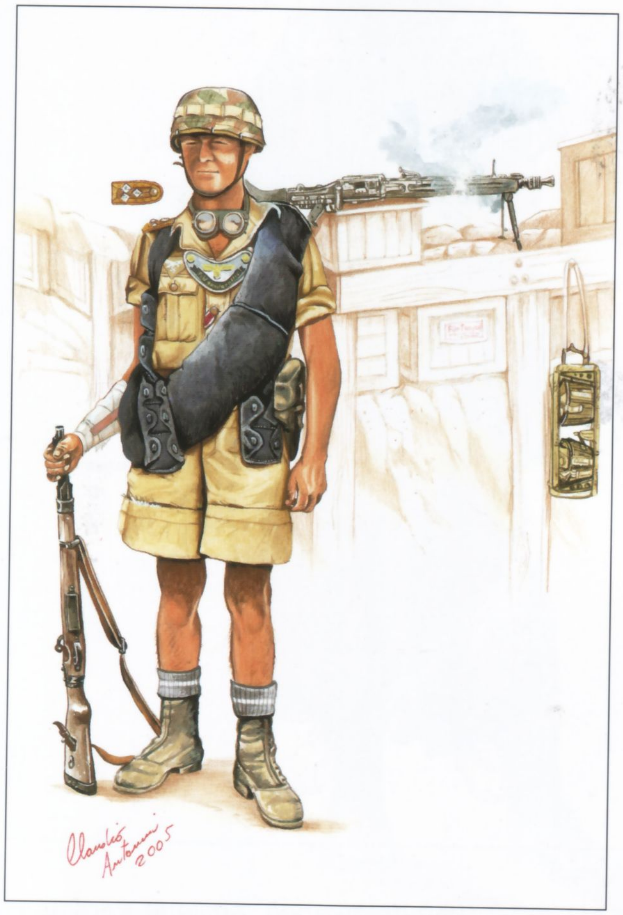
Our NCO belongs to the *Artillerie-Regiment* of the Hermann Göring Division - the red piping around his white collar patches marks him as a member of the artillery batteries. White was the distinctive *Waffenfarbe* of the Hermann Göring Division. Of particular interest is the tropical peaked cap, nicknamed *Hermann Meyer* by the airmen. This derived from the fact that at the start of WWII, Hermann Göring firmly declared that if a single British bomb landed on German territory, he would change his own name to "*Hermann Meyer*"! The *Hermann Meyer* cap had a neck flap to protect from the sun, giving a fashionable look "*a la Legion Etrangére*". Regular *Luftwaffen* badges were applied on the *Hermann Meyer*. An other-ranks pattern of the *Fliegerbluse* is worn in continental *feld-blau* with tropical trousers. The list of garments of some *Luftwaffe* veterans also termed the blue-gray color of their uniforms as *grau-blau*.

Some Hermann Göring Division units landing in Tunisia in March 1943 wore complete blue-gray uniforms and black leather marching boots. Note that in our figure the Luftwaffe issue tropical equipment and ammunition pouches are in black leather. The steel helmet has a Hessian cover. A typical feature of our *Unterfeldwebel* is the M1940 SS camouflage smock. Some war documentaries shot in color by U.S. combat camera units in Tunisia show Hermann Göring Division prisoners wearing unmistakable SS green "spring plane tree" smocks.

PLATE M2. Master Sergeant (*Stabsfeldwebel*), *Feldgendarmerie*, Ramcke Brigade, Egypt (1942) – Tunisia (1943)

Each German combat unit had its own military police or *Feldgendarmerie*. On several occasions this particular unit took part in fighting. In the left inset we can see the shoulder strap of the *Stabsfeldwebel*. It is not clear if the *Feldgendarmen* attached to the paratroop units had branch color piping or *Waffenfarbe* around their shoulder straps in the orange color of the *Feldgendarmerie*, or in the golden yellow of the paratroopers.

Similarly, it is not definite whether the members wore the ranks of the *Feldgendamerie* (i.e. *Stabswachtmeister*), or the rank of *Fallschirmjäger* (i.e *Stabsfeldwebel*). The figure wears the duty *Feldgendamerie* aluminum gorget with reflective detail. This *Fallschirmjäger Feldgendarm* has been issued with new blue-gray (*feld-blauen*) bandoleers, though tan or camouflage types also existed (see also Plate M3).



The helmet of the figure is the prescribed M37 jump helmet, a more compact version of the regular Wehrmacht M35 steel helmet (see Plates M3). The M37 paratroop helmet was issued with a camouflage cover, here in a sand, red-brown and green "splinter" scheme. In April 1943, some *Jäger* in Tunisia chose to paint their helmets in a sand, red-brown and green camouflage finish, or even with some gray or green streaks on a sand background. The NCO in the figure is dressed in a *Luftwaffe* tan tropical shirt and shorts. Although most *Ramcke* members were hardened veterans, they rarely sported the Narvik arm shield. The Spanish combat and jump badges were just displayed on the tropical tunic, and not on the shirt. Just visible on the right breast of the shirt is the *Luftwaffe* eagle in a cheaper production design.

Fallschirmjäger wore shorts rolled up for elegance, although Commonwealth Bombay Bloomers could also be worn. Jump boots in brown leather had side lace-ups. The peculiar tropical battle garb with a rolled up greatcoat slung over the shoulder is described by an Italian eyewitness. Since *Ramcke* personnel were often engaged in night patrols and engaged in savage close combat with opponents such as New Zealanders (including Maoris), the rolled greatcoat would give additional protection. Some photographs shot during the Tunisian Campaign show paratroopers dressed in the M1940 tropical motorcyclist greatcoat, made of olive green rubberized canvas. The *Stabsfeldwebel* is armed with a holstered P38 Walther pistol and a 33/40 Brunn rifle.

The Ramcke Brigade was first issued with the new MG42 machine gun in late August 1942. The MG42 could fire 1,200-1,500 rounds per minute, and is often considered the best machine gun of WWII.

PLATE M3. Lance-Sergeant (*Hauptgefreiter*), *Fallschirmjäger* Ramcke Brigade, 1942-43

In August 1942, after heavy losses of vehicles and men during Rommel's offensive, a hard-pressed Hitler was forced to deploy the *Fallschirmjäger Brigade* (Paratroops) *Ramcke* on the Deir El Shein Line. Despite *Ramcke's* paratroopers being veterans of Narvik, Rotterdam and Crete, many of them were young boys, some just seventeen years old.

Our *Jäger* is completely equipped for a desert patrol (possibly at night). The jump smock is open at the legs and chest for comfort, thus exposing the Luftwaffe tropical tunic. A common punishment for an undisciplined *Jäger* consisted of a march under the harsh African sun, with complete field equipment, including rolled greatcoat and rucksack! (See Plate M2).

Note the gravity knife in the right trouser pocket - it was used to search for mines and in hand-to-hand combat. The sand-colored smock is privately purchased by our *Jäger*, and it has integral cloth bandoleers. The scarf and the comet painted on the pinkish sand-colored helmet are company devices. Otherwise, the *Luftwaffe* eagle decal was also seen on paratrooper helmets.

The gasmask bag on the chest contains hand grenades (M1924 *Stiehlhandgranaten*), whilst the huge pockets of the smock contain FG42 magazines. The *Jäger* is arranging his formidable FG42 airborne automatic rifle. The FG42 in 7.9mm caliber could also be fired from its bipod. The *Bataillon von der Heydte* of the Ramcke Brigade was commanded by Major von der Heydte, a German baron from the Rhineland. At Depienne, Tunisia, in November 1942, the *Grüne Teufel*, or Green Devils of the Ramcke Brigade, faced the British Red Devils for the first time.

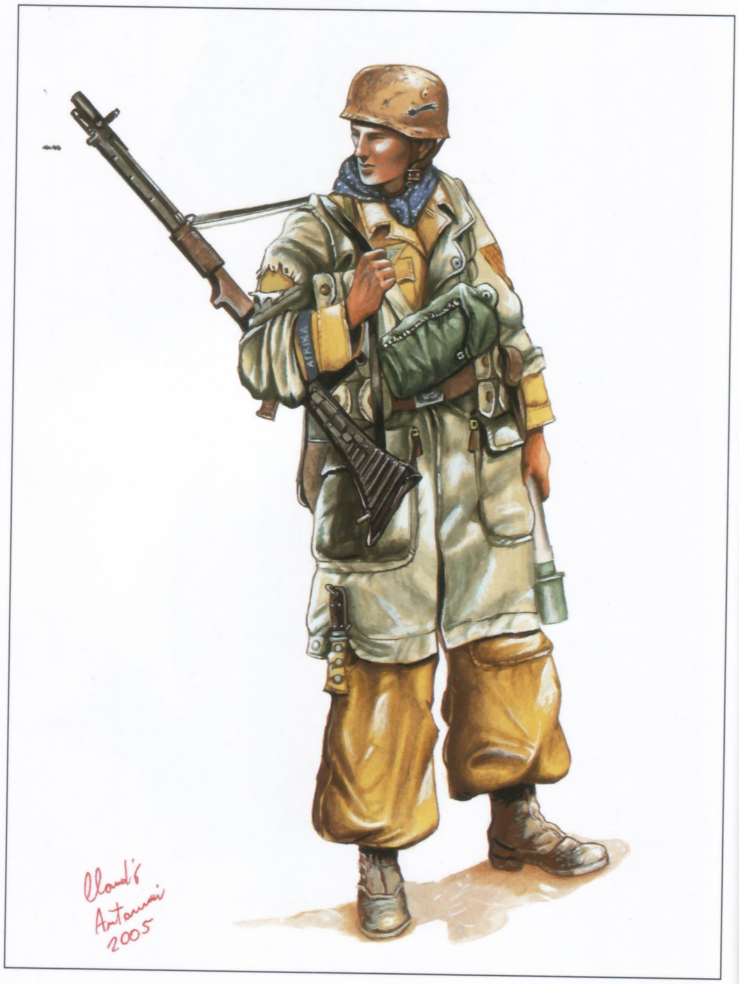
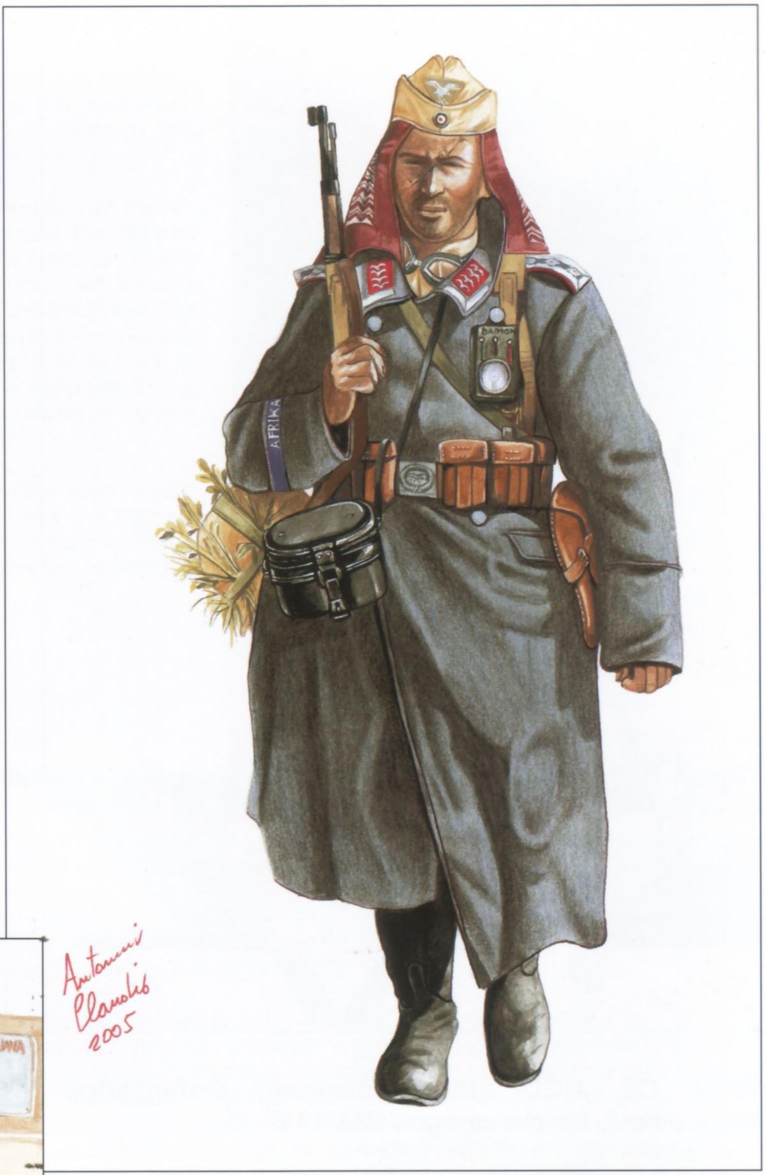


PLATE N1. NCO (*Oberfeldwebel*), *Flak-Abteilung* 606 (606th Anti-Aircraft Battalion), 1942-43

The seasoned NCO represented in this plate has protected himself with a *Luftwaffe* blue-gray (*feld-blau*) coarse greatcoat. No special version of the *Luftwaffe* greatcoat was prepared for the desert. The shoulder straps and collar patches indicate the rank and employ the red color of *Flak* units.

An interesting snapshot of an airman in North Africa shows him with an Arab *shemagh* around the neck to protect against the freezing nights and the sun during the day. The *Luftwaffe* had its own design of side cap with special emblems, although many army versions were also used. The steel helmet is completed with the strap from a bread bag to hold camouflage foliage. *Luftwaffe* airmen frequently went on patrols in the surrounding terrain of their batteries. The tropical type of brown leather ammunition pouches for the Kar 98k are shown here. Note the binoculars case for the prismatic binoculars and the personal flashlight that was used during night patrols.



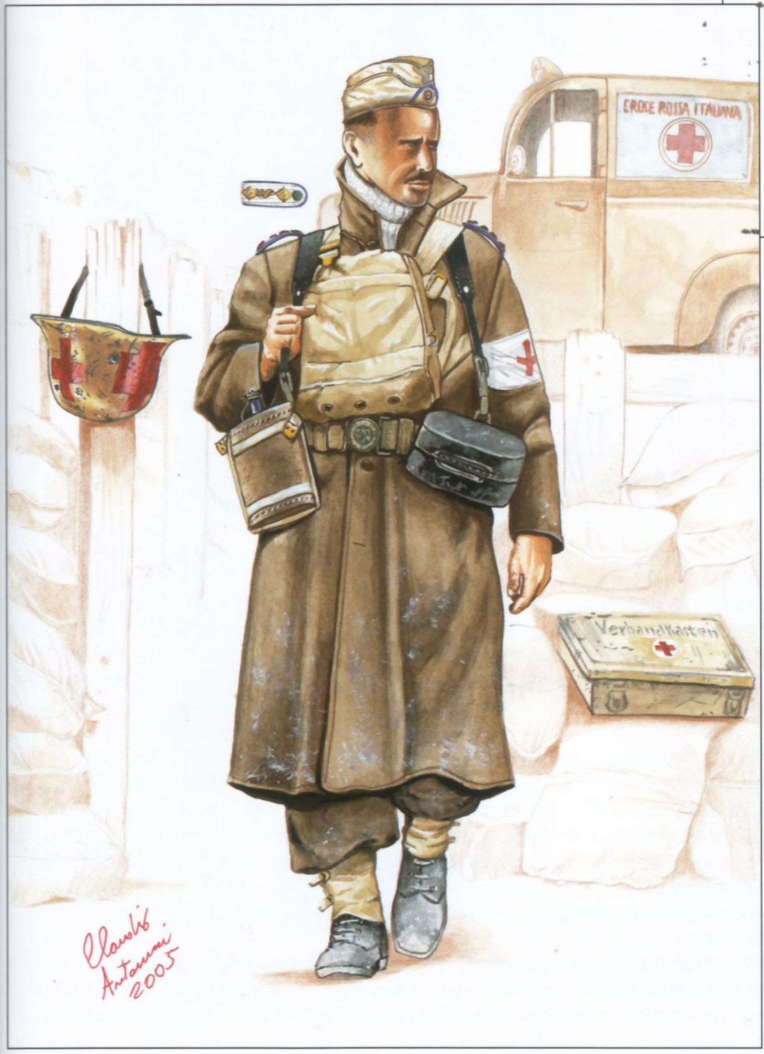


PLATE N2. Medical Officer (*Arzt*), Ambulance Company (*Krankentransport-Kompanie* 705), 1942-43

Several accounts tell of Axis troops completely dressed in British garments, equipped with Commonwealth equipment and driving British vehicles even with their original plates! Often national or regimental flags were displayed as air identification features by Axis forces (Plates F2 and J2). In one episode a flight of *Stukas* attacked such columns of Commonwealth vehicles manned by German soldiers dressed in British outfits. Even Italian *sahariane* were manufactured with British cotton. The military doctor in this plate wears an old single-breasted Commonwealth greatcoat. A *DAK* veteran recalls how he lost his German tropical greatcoat and thus used a New Zealand one. Khaki drab trousers and canvas gaiters are also worn here. The 2nd pattern gas-respirator bag is used for holding his personal kit.

The figure also holds a British water bottle and a German special medical pouch and wears an *Afrika-Korps* officer's belt. Note the peculiar tan helmet with large red crosses: it has a shape similar to the *Luftschutz* (air protection) pattern. An *Edelweiss* is also painted on the helmet, as probably our doctor served in a mountain unit. Note the tropical *Feldmütze* with medical dark blue *Waffenfarbe;* whilst the right inset displays the shoulder strap of a 1st Lieutenant-Doctor with the gold Staff of Aesculapius. Note the turtleneck sweater of civilian type and, in the foreground, a German first aid container painted in tropical tan hue. In the background an ambulance of the Italian Red Cross is visible.

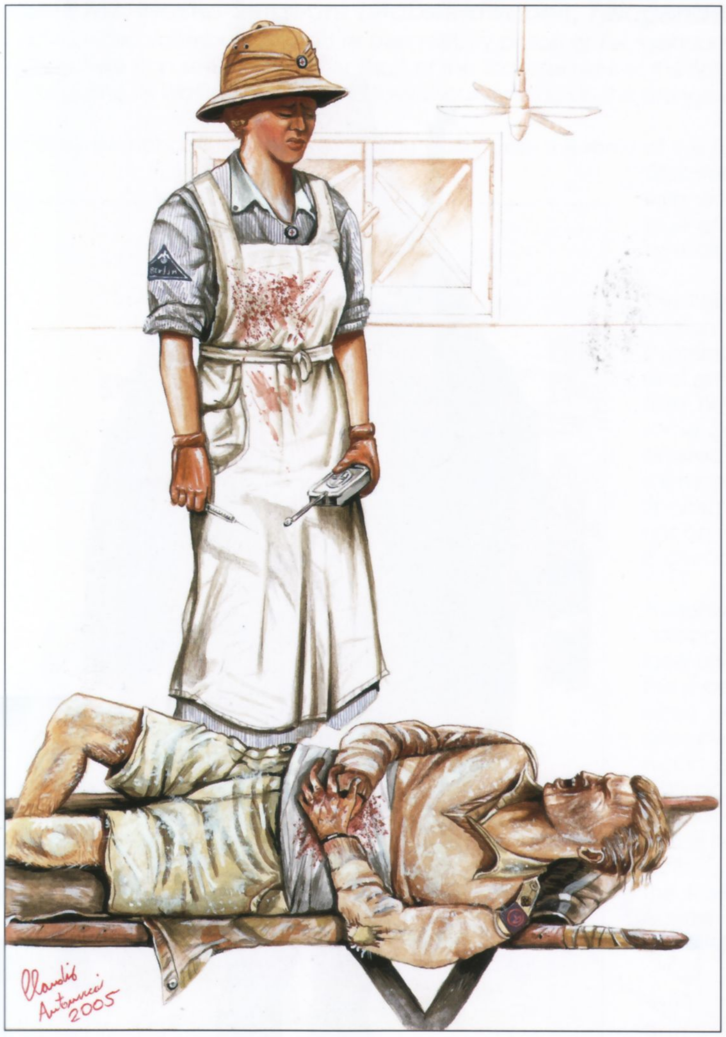


PLATE N3. Nurse, *Tripolis Kriegslazarett*, 1941-43

This *DAK* nurse is serving in Tripoli's military hospital. Wounded enemies were not infrequently treated by Italian and German medical personnel. Photographs also attest how wounded men at El Alamein were treated by Commonwealth surgeons (see in this plate the Scottish officer of the 51st (Highland) Division). The nurse wears the usual Medical Corps dress, and the badge on the right shows her identification area as "*Berlin*".

A system of blue rank piping was worn on the corners of the collar, while the enameled brooches on the tropical helmet and on the throat indicated the various grades of sister and nurse qualification. Four German nurses and sisters were awarded the 2nd Class Iron Cross for their service in Africa.

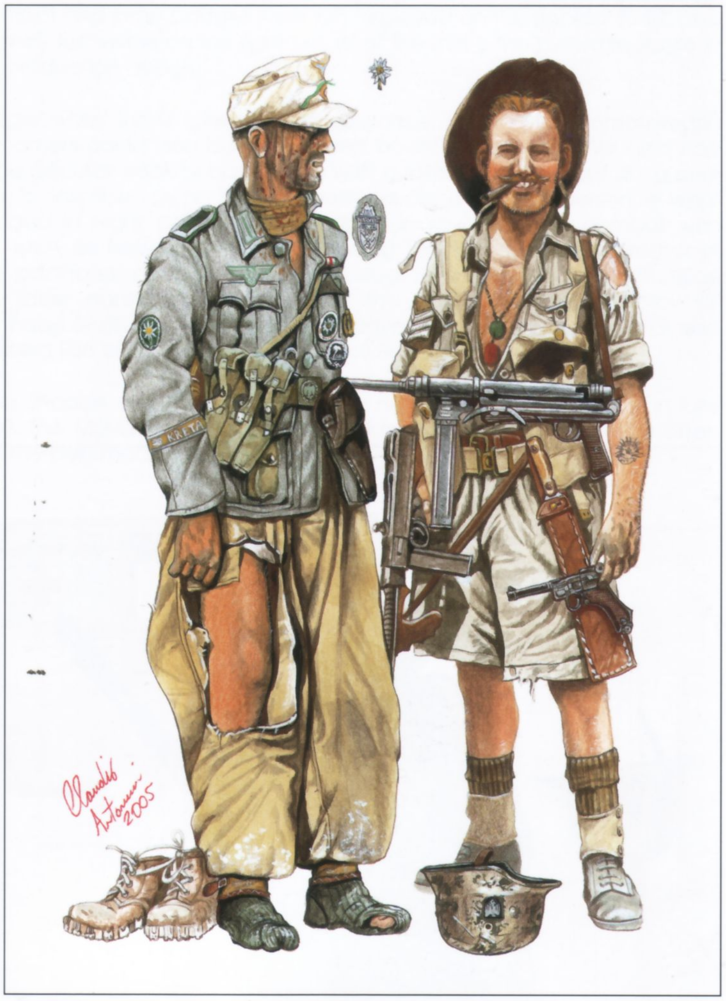


PLATE O2. NCO (*Unterfeldwebel*), *Gebirgsjäger-Kompanie 2*, *Sonderverband 288*, 1942-43

Among elite troops of the *Panzerarmee Afrika*, a special unit was created in December 1941. It was composed of German personnel from the Middle East or former German colonies of Africa. These men knew Arab languages well, and for this reason, operated behind Allied lines as commandos or spies. In early 1942, *Sonderverband 288* was attached to the 90th *leichte* Division.

Mountain Company 2 was present in this special unit. Our *Unterfeldwebel* has been captured by an Australian Sergeant of the 9th Australian Division. His Thompson M1928A1 was appreciated by Axis forces too. The Australian has taken away the NCO's personal MP40 submachine gun and P08 Luger pistol.

The shabby look of some soldiers in the desert is very evident in prisoner photographs. But these generally depict soldiers as they appeared in action or shortly after battle. Note the tattered tropical *Feldmütze* - it is in an almost white color, faded by the sun. It was considered the "real seal" of a *DAK* veteran, so new recruits bleached their field caps with plenty of soap in so-called "factory bulletproofing"! The field cap of our figure displays the metal *Edelweiss* of the Alpine Troops (upper inset) and the "V" *Soutache Waffenfarbe* in *hell-grün,* or light green. It is interesting to recall that Germany used a lot of gray-green (*feld-grau*) uniforms in Africa and several of its vehicles were still painted in the continental *panzer-grau* color.

This NCO wears the M1940 field tunic - it bears collar patches and a Nazi eagle in mouse gray on a sage green background for mimetic purposes. The shoulder straps are of M1935 dark green pattern (with *Tresse* lace for an NCO). A fair number of trade badges are placed on the tunic of our *Unterfeldwebel*. On the right sleeve there is the woven *Edelweiss* (alpine star) mountain badge and the *Kreta* veteran cuff title. On the left arm is the Narvik 1940 Campaign shield (see lower inset). The left breast shows the ribbon of the Italian-German campaign medal, the bronze Infantry Assault badge, the enameled *Heeres-Bergführer* (mountain guide) and the gray metal badge of *Sonderverband 288*. The baggy trousers were a common feature of Alpine troops operating in North Africa (the other mountain *Gebirgs-Regiment* was numbered 756th). Note the M1940 web anklets. Some photos taken of German prisoners – perhaps of *Gebirgsjäger* – show them with breeches and puttees.

Sometimes Commonwealth soldiers took off the shoes of their prisoners to avoid any escapes, and depicted here are the special boots of the *Gebirgsjäger* with studs and cleats (see also plate O1). The personal equipment of this *Unterfeldwebel* includes an *Afrika* other-ranks belt, P08 hard-shell holster, M1938/40 olive canvas MP40 ammunition pouch, and tan tropical gasmask canister (not visible). Many *Jäger* of mountain ski troops did not ever see snow. Sadly they ended their days in the desert!

PLATE O1. 2nd Lieutenant (*SS Untersturmführer*), Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*), Tunisia, 1943

Some photographs of SS Police members show them wearing the *Afrika* cuff title. They were members of the German Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*) which controlled, particularly in Tunisia, intelligence, prisoners of war, Allied spies and commandos, as well as political security.

This particular tunic is in the Italian *sahariana* cut. This tunic had an SD emblem on the left arm and the green *Waffenfarbe* of the *SS Polizei* on the shoulder straps. The ribbons represent the Long Service Medal and *Polizei* Service Medal. His breast badges include the SS runes worn by those units with a plain black collar patch on the right, Infantry assault, SS sporting and partisan combat, as well as Iron Crosses of 1st and 2nd Class. The characteristic SS tropical cap with no false flaps has the devices woven in *Bevo* style like the Nazi eagle on the left arm. They are all in beige on a black background for tropical issue. The sand-colored helmet bears *SS* rune decals as seen on a rare specimen in the Infantry Museum at Rome. The personal equipment of our officer includes an SS canvas belt and a submachine gun ammunition pouch.

His armament consists of the holstered Walther 7.65mm pistol and MP28 II submachine gun. An M1924 stick grenade, or *Stielhandgranate*, is inserted in his belt. The figure is inspecting a U.S. bivouac in Tunisia, and he has found a U.S. dog tag of a soldier of Jewish religion (note the hanging Star of David, or *Magdem David*). The glasses are secured to a rubber strap to avoid losing them in action.

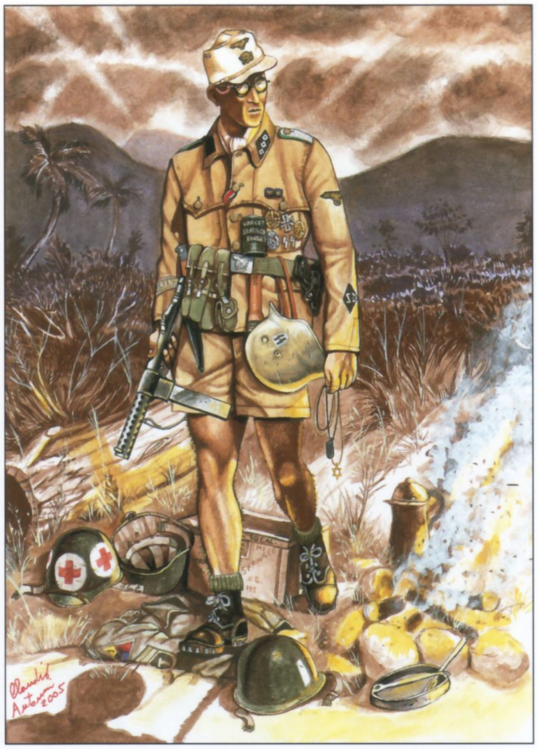
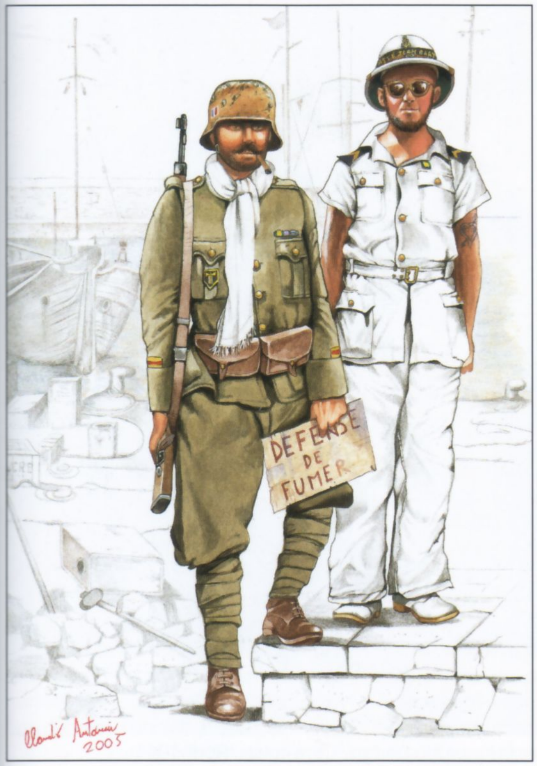


PLATE O3/O4. Warrant Officer 1st Class (*Adjutant-chef*), *Phalange Africaine*; Petty Officer (*Quartier-Maitre*), Battleship "*Jean Bart*", Port of Tunis, 1943

After the collapse of France in June 1940, many French citizens, if not the majority, supported the Vichy government. Particularly in the French colonies of Africa and the Far East, a substantial number of French and Arab soldiers were enrolled in the *Phalange Africaine,* or African Phalanx. This unit was led by *Commandant* Curnier, and was trained by German cadres in Algeria and Tunisia. Faithful to Marshal Pétain who led the Vichy government, the *Phalange Africaine* (also termed *Légion Impérial* in Napoleonic fashion) saw its first action at Klioua on the Tunisian front (April 1943), and it fought hard against overwhelming Allied forces. In early May 1943, the *Phalange Africaine* retreated to Tunis but did not leave its national colors, or *Fanion Tricolore,* in enemy hands; the survivors were evacuated to France and Italy.

More French and Arab troops served in German units. The *Fränkische Kompanie* attached to the 754th Panzergrenadier Regiment, the *Deutsche-ArabischeLehrAbteilung* (Arab-German instruction unit), and in *Sonderverband 287* and *288* performing commando duties behind Allied lines (Plate O2). Some German cadres came from Iraq and therefore spoke Arabic or French. Thus they also operated as spies, raiders and intelligence experts in the famous *InfanterieLehrRegiment zbV "Brandenburg"* special German units. Perhaps some French and Arab members also served in the *Sicherheitsdienst* to capture rebels, enemy saboteurs and Jews (see Plate O1). The figure in Plate O3 wears an interesting combination of French and *Panzerarmee Afrika* items. The German M35 helmet has the tricolor flash on the right, and French cockades are also observed.



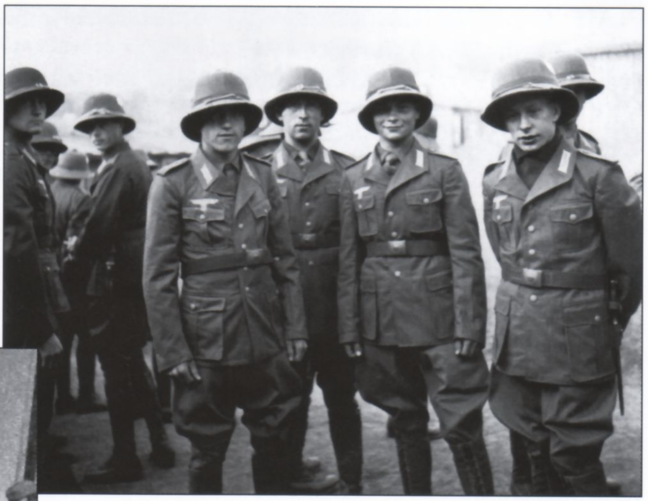
The French *vert-kaki* uniform bears the rank badges of *Adjutant-chef* on the cuffs, while the shield on the breast is the nationalist symbol of the Vichy regime - a Frankish double axe or *Francisca.* The left breast pocket of this tunic (*vareuse*) displays the campaigns of this seasoned Warrant Officer – from left to right: Military Medal awarded to honorable NCOs, the 1940 Cross of *Combatant,* and the Colonial Medal with two bars for colonial campaigns. Ironically, such medals were earned fighting Germany during both World Wars! Note the ubiquitous scarf (*cheich*) of the French colonial veterans. According to Bedouin habit, during sandstorms the *cheich* was also used as a turban.

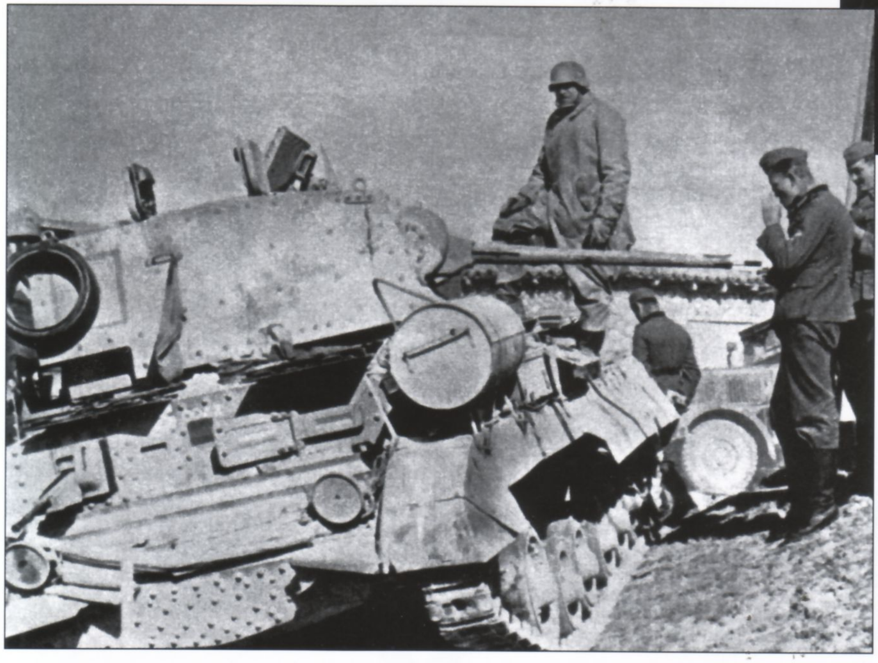
French leather equipment (M1935) was used as well as the standard German Kar 98k rifle. The harness and French *Lebel* 1886-93 pattern were also distributed. In 1943 the Vichy Navy still had a powerful and modern fleet. During Operation Torch, the battleship "*Jean Bart"* opened fire from Casablanca against Allied landing forces, but it was hit heavily by 406mm shells from the battleship USS *Massachusetts.* French naval forces also included one cruiser, seven torpedo destroyers and eight submarines. All but one of them were sunk by the U.S. warships USS *Wichita* and USS *Tuscaloosa.* Nevertheless, Casablanca was still in Axis hands. On 11 November 1942, all hostilities ceased and Allied forces occupied the Vichy territories of Morocco and Algeria.

Regulations for French petty officer uniforms existed from 1922. The dress for hot climate included a pith helmet (bearing the ship's name on the ribbon), a shirt or a jacket (introduced in 1925) with long, matching trousers. All the garments were manufactured in white linen. Canvas shoes completed this comfortable outfit, while shorts were also worn. The short-sleeved jacket displays the shoulder tabs with rank chevrons. The Vichy Navy also used French colonial garments, while the Army wore *Panzerarmee Afrika* ones too.

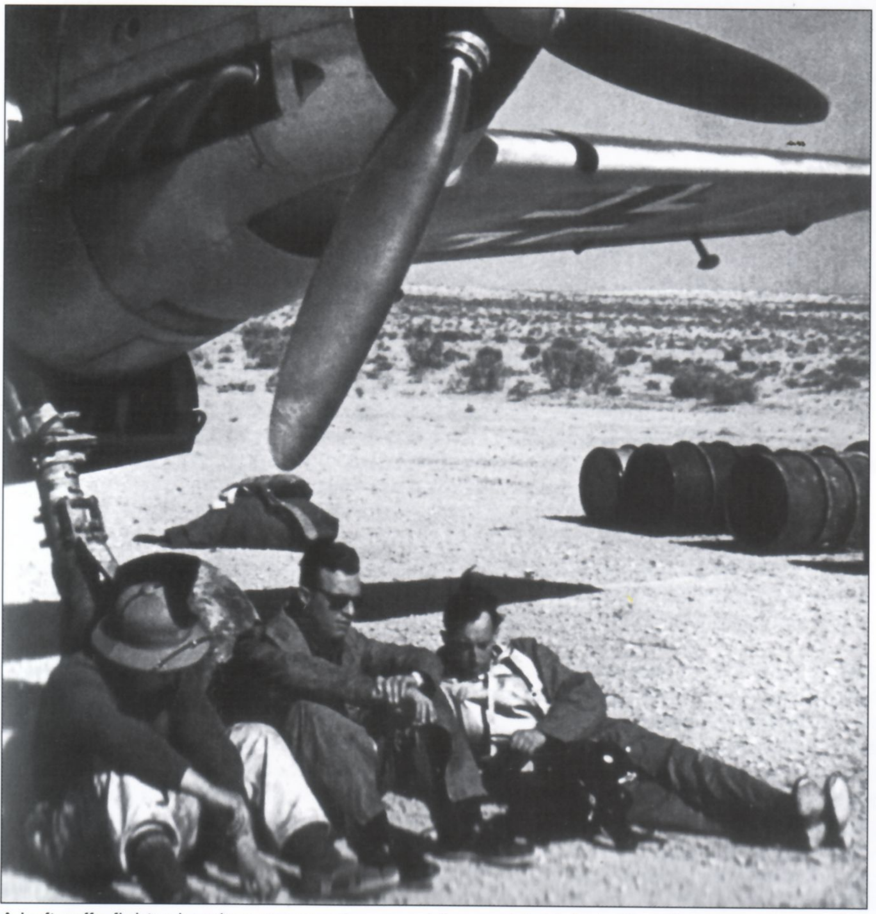
Italy also organized mixed forces of Italians, Arabs and Indians. An example of this is the *Raggruppamento Frecce Rosse,* or Red Arrow Group. It included a Parachute Battalion of Tunisians in May 1942 – May 1943.

Just arrived in Tripoli, these DAK members show their newly issued tropical uniforms with sun helmets. February 1941. (See Plate J1)

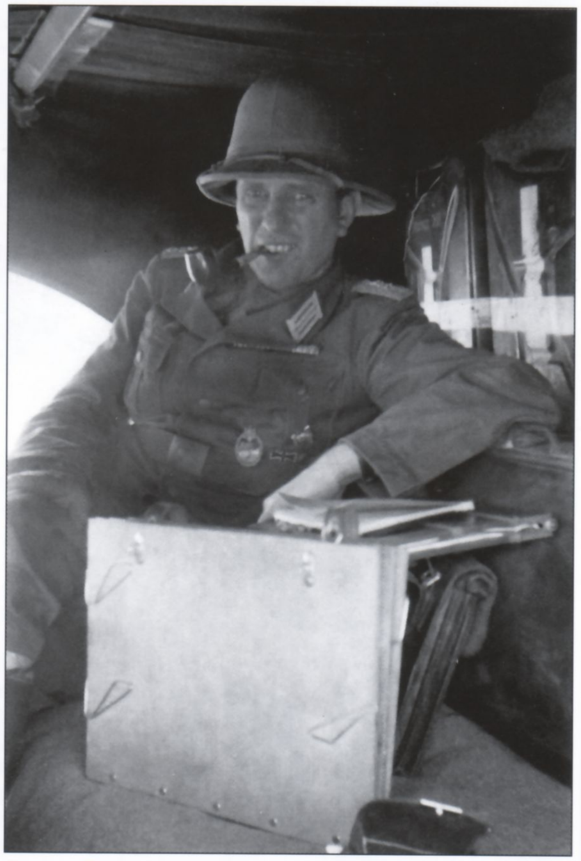




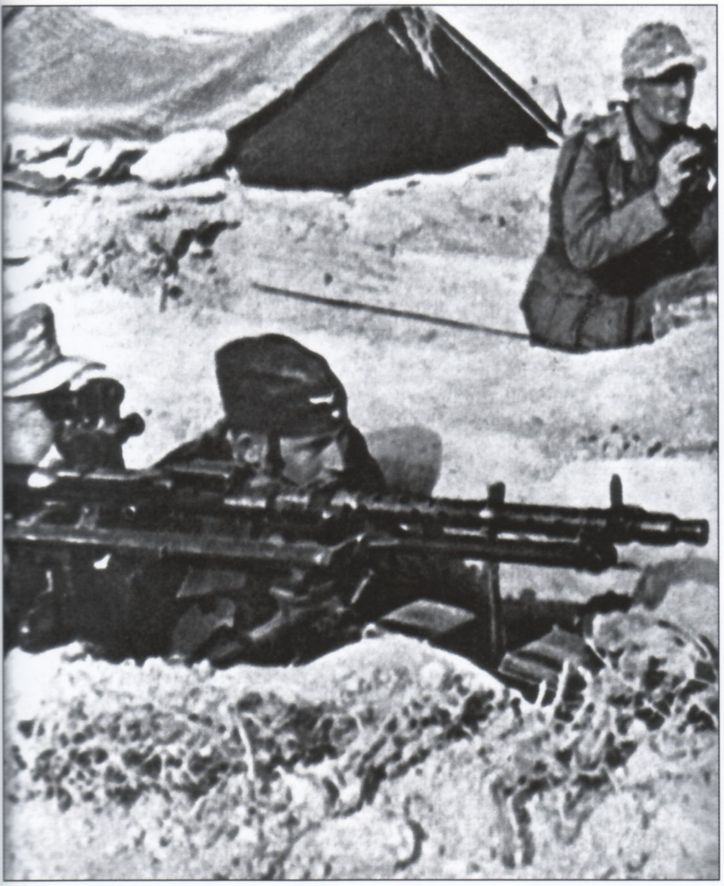
Three *Afrika* men clearly dressed in continental gray-green, inspecting a knocked out British tank. Early 1941.



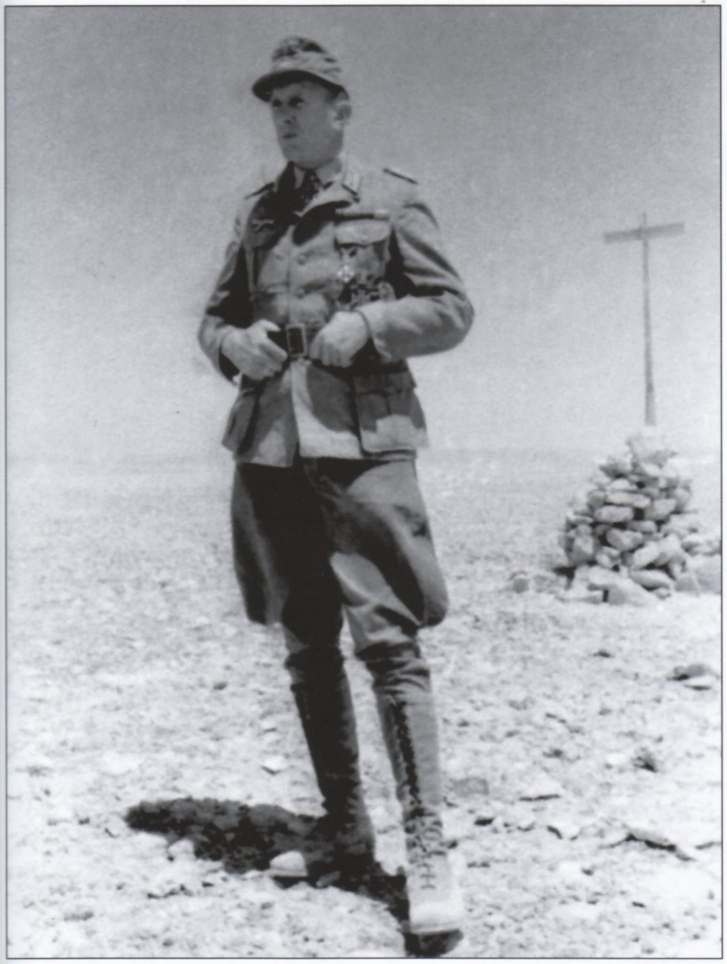
A Luftwaffe fighter bomber crew resting on a Libyan airfield. Note their heterogeneous attire including civilian garments and Italian officer's "India" solar topee. Early 1941.



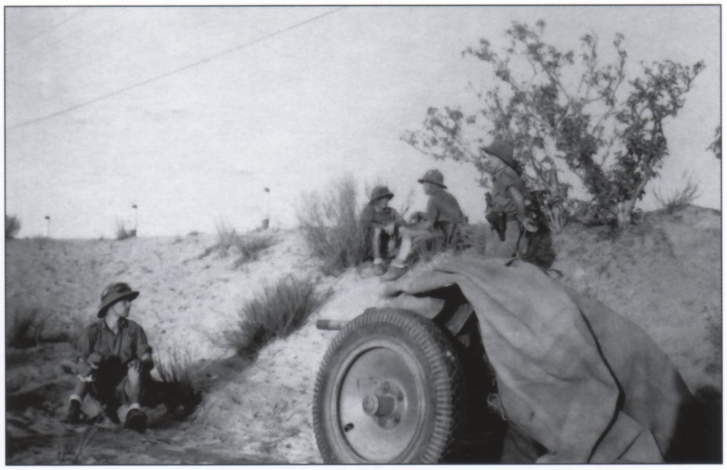
Panzer *Oberstleutnant* (perhaps from 8th Panzer Regiment). He does not wear the typical skulls of the Imperial German Hussars on his lapels. Note his Italian colonial helmet and silver tank battle badge. Cyrenaica, April 1941.



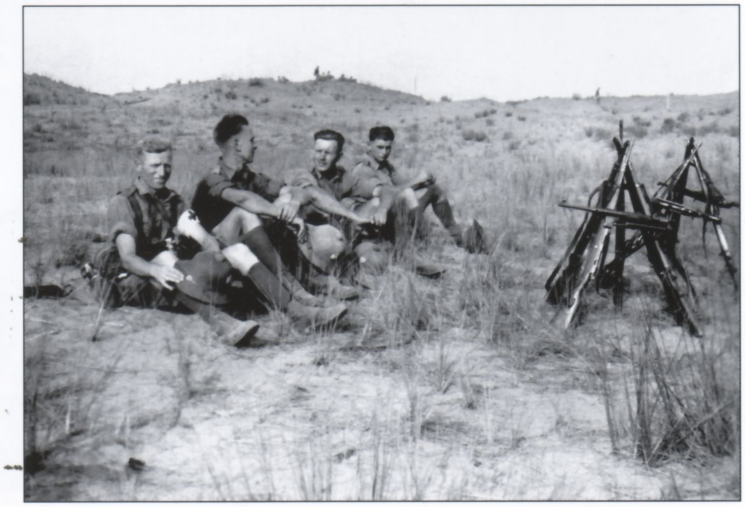
Maschinengewehr 34 squad of the Luftwaffe. Khaki and blue-gray uniforms are both in use. Cyrenaica, 1941.



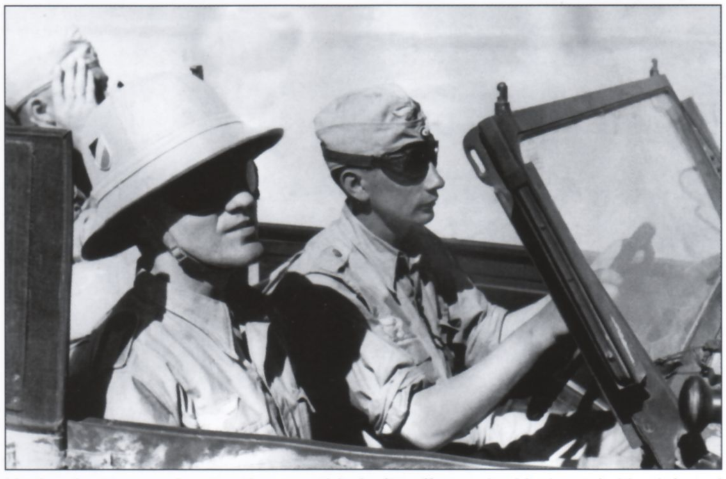
Typical *African* attire for an officer. Note the silver Nazi eagle on the breast.



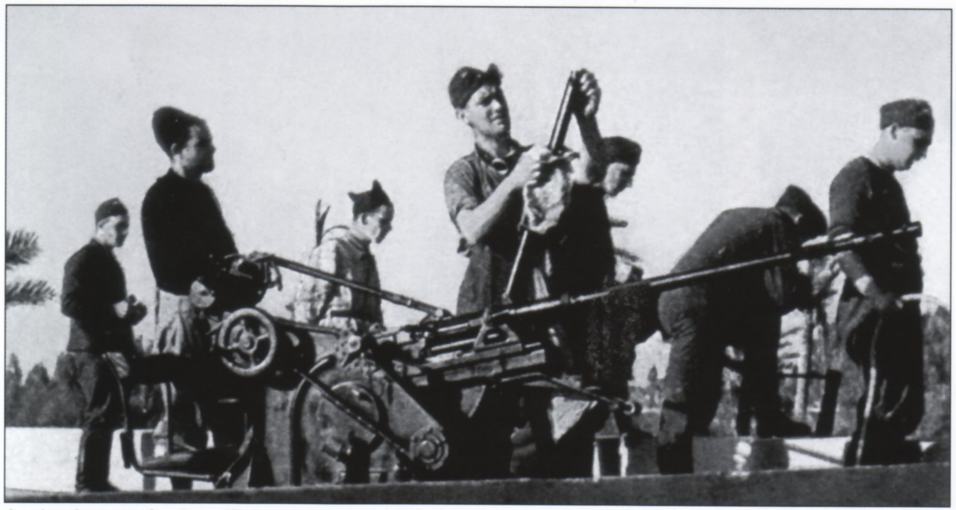
Anti-tank crew of a 3.7cm Pak gun. This was in the initial phase of DAK operations, 1941.



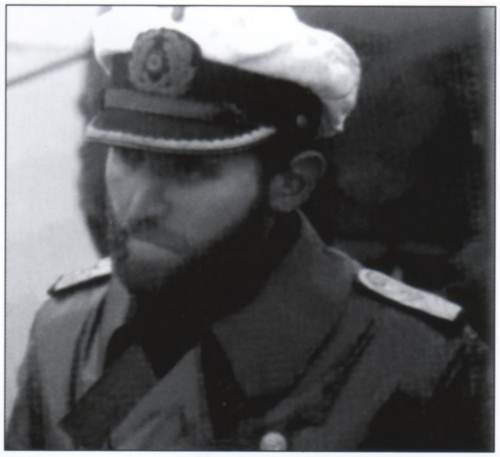
A moment of rest for these DAK recruits. Despite the High Command's prohibition, they wear shorts and socks in action. They are not sunburned veterans yet!



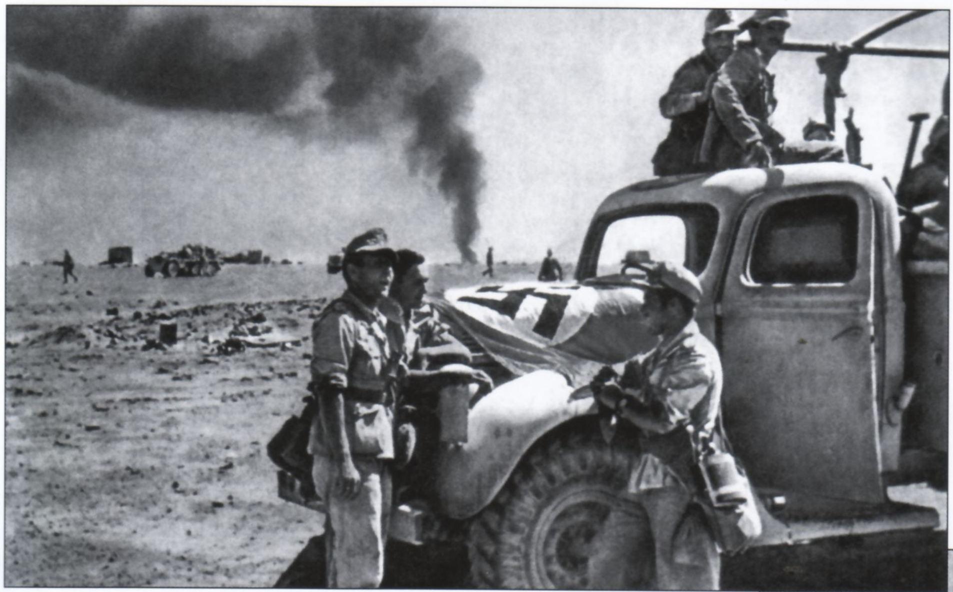
Under the camera's attention are this Luftwaffe tropical helmet (with pin) and the *ZeissUmbral* goggles of the driver.



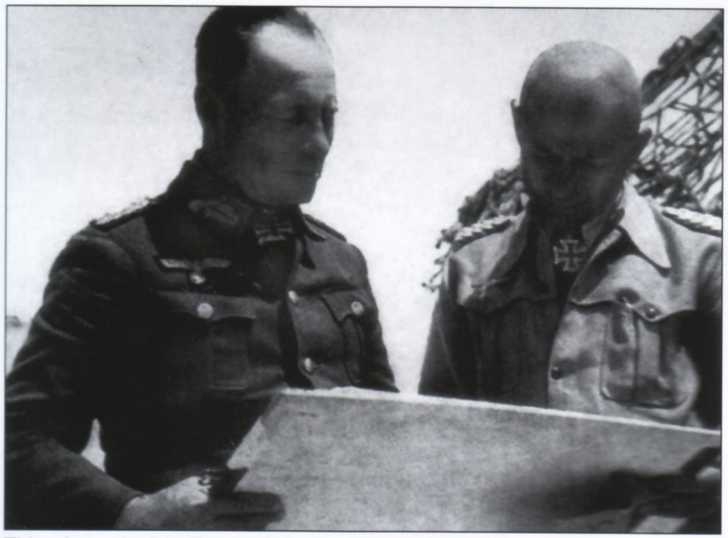
A mixed crew of a 2cm Flak gun (probably *Flak-Abteilung* 606). The crew is composed of Blackshirts of the *Milizia Contraerei,* and Luftwaffe gunners. Most of the figures in this photo have gray-green or blue-gray uniforms. Kufra Oasis, 1941.



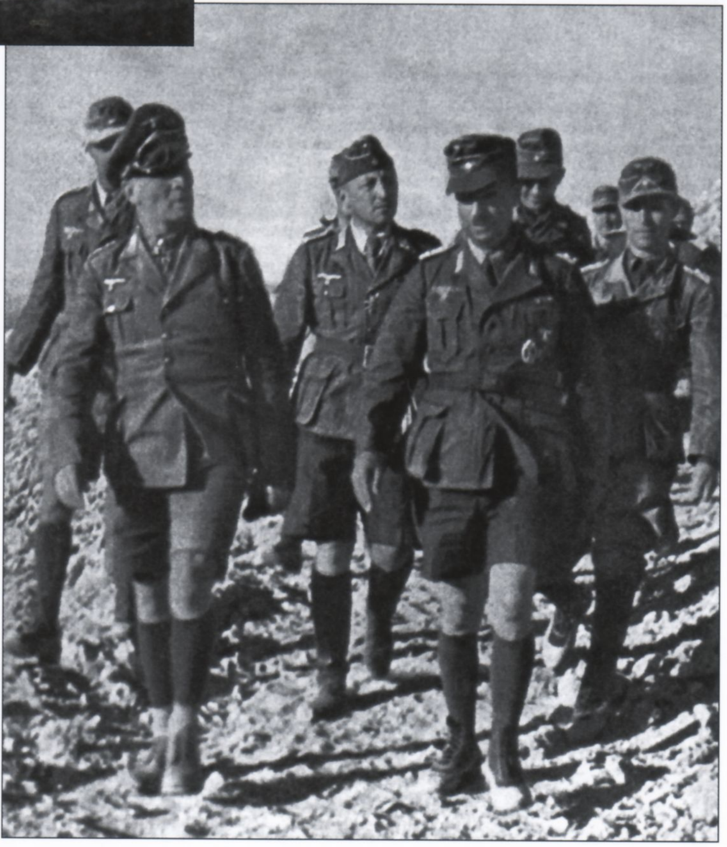
A *Kriegsmarine* commander on a submarine in the Mediterranean Sea. He wears a fashionable summer peaked cap and a leather coat.



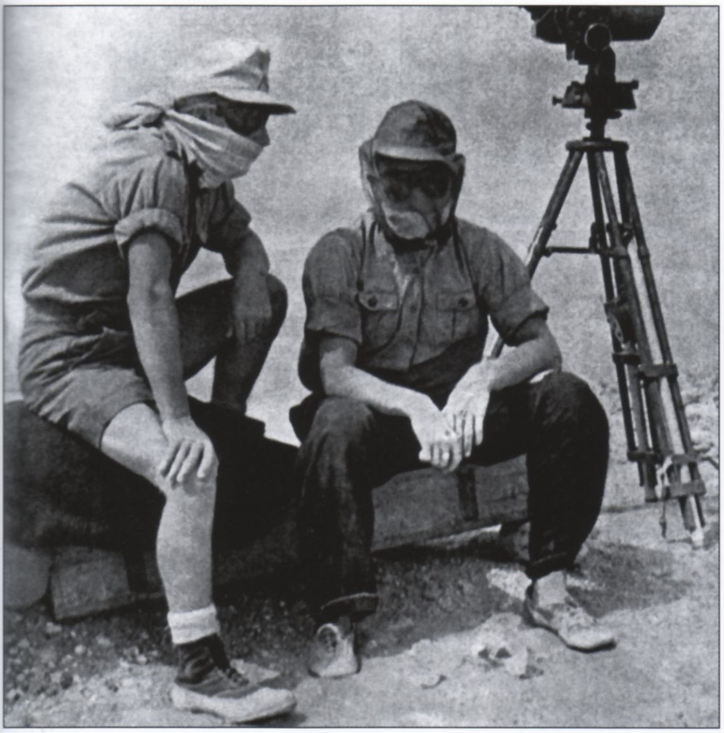
An interesting photo of DAK personnel. Some men have sand-colored uniforms, whilst the veterans sport faded bone-white colored garments. Note the use of Commonwealth equipment. The truck is a captured Dodge with a Nazi national flag for air recognition! (See the background of Plate J2). The date is around the time of the capture of Tobruk, 1942.



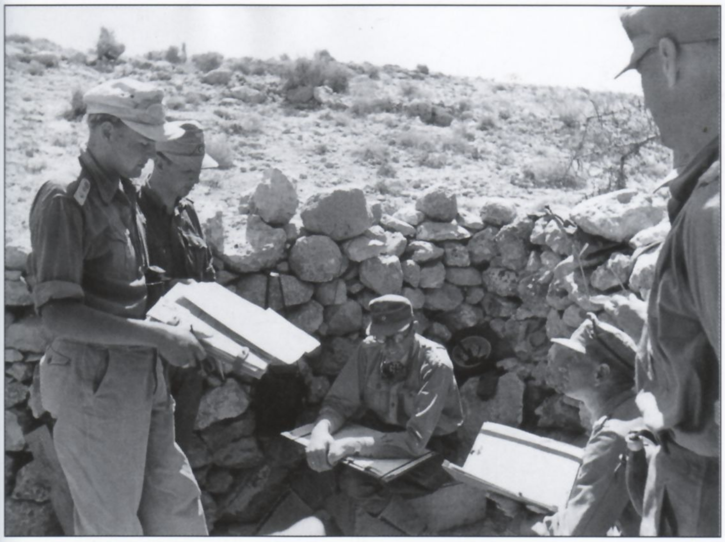
This photo depicts Rommel dressed in a lightweight gray-green outfit with general's regalia. The officer on the right is the *Luftwaffe* commander in North Africa - *Generalmajor* Frölich is wearing an Italian *sahariana* with Luftwaffe regalia.



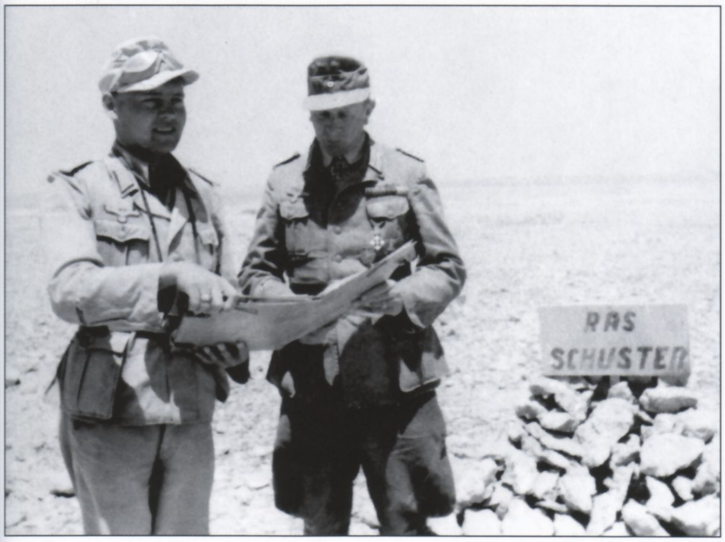
A photo of Rommel and a group of his officers. The sage and olive green uniforms are clearly visible. The officer in the center is Major Bach, commander of the 1st Battalion, 104th Infantry Regiment, in Sollum, 1941. (See Plate L1)



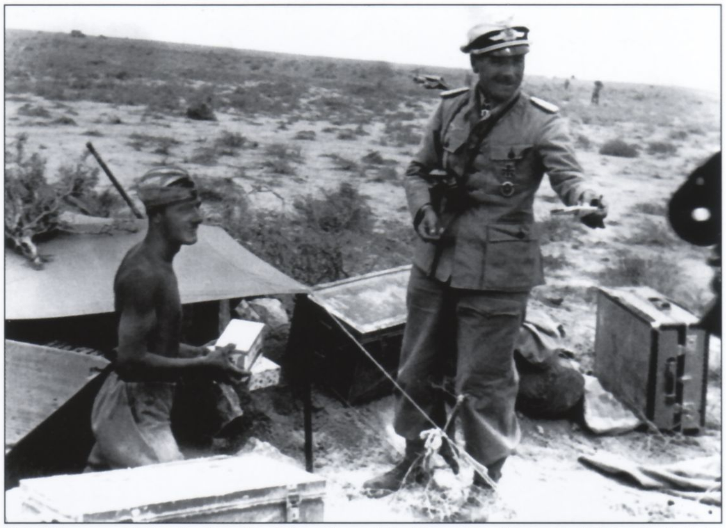
A valuable photo: scarves, goggles and mosquito nets were fairly typical accessories used during desert storms. Note the sneakers and trousers of the pajamas.



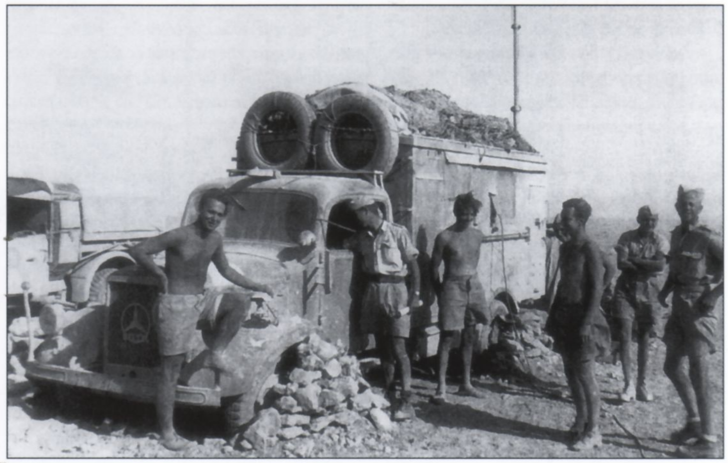
Some *Offiziere* in shirt sleeves in a desert outpost (1941-42).



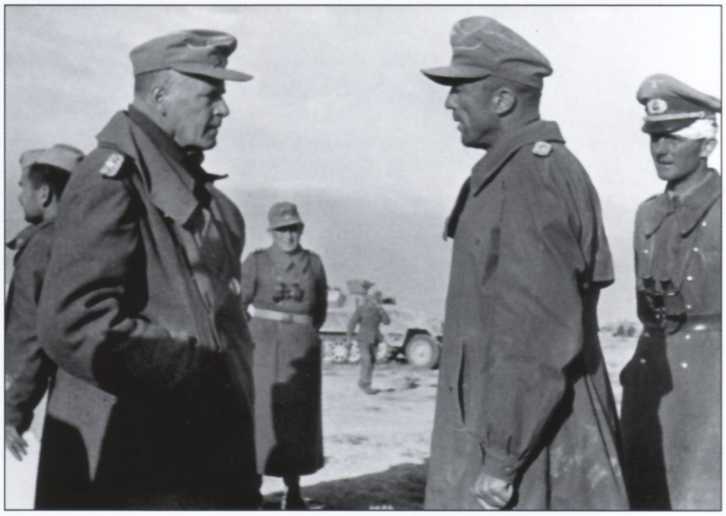
Members of *Armee-Kartenstelle 575,* or army map depot.



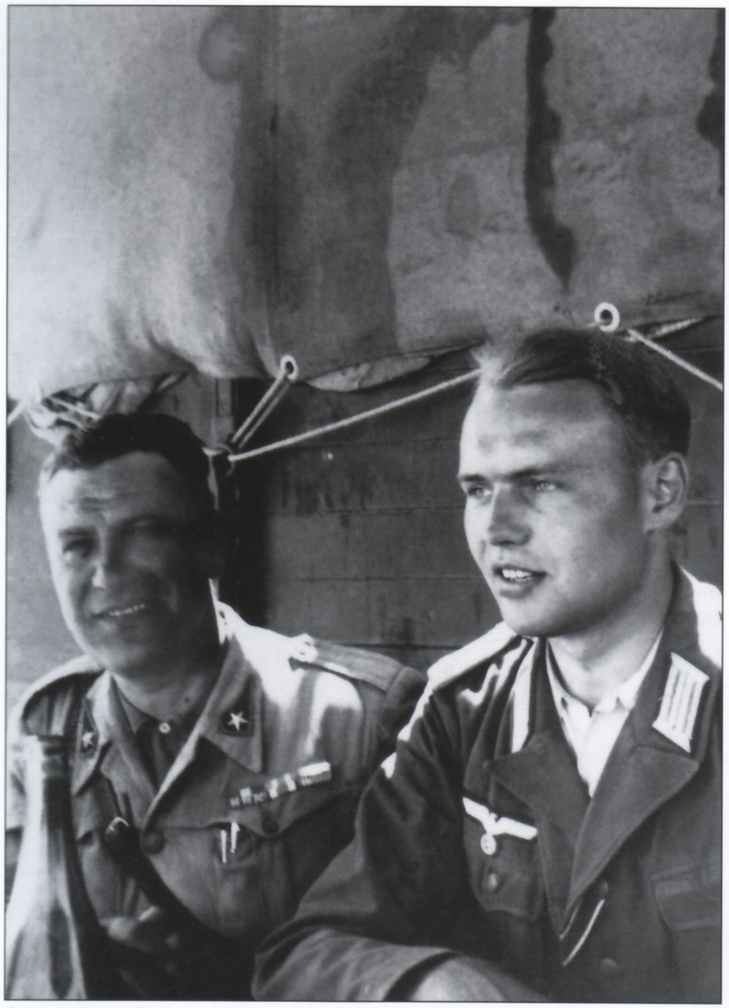
A field store of the Luftwaffe. The cheerful officer is adorned with typical flight regalia, Libyan desert 1941-42.



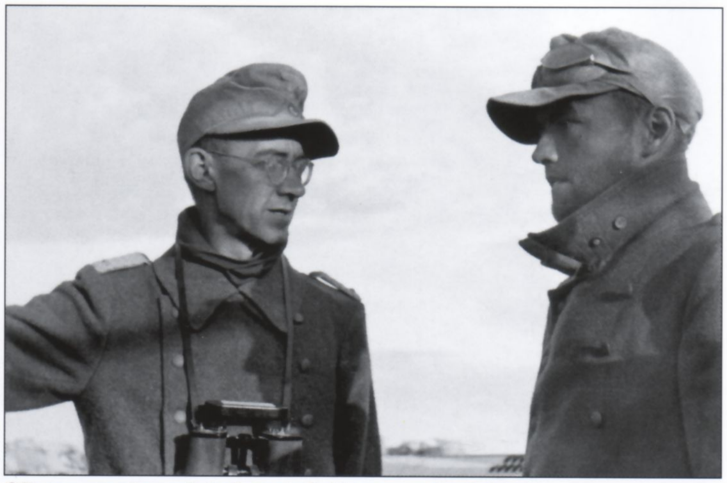
A Mercedes lorry of the Signals Intercept Company 621, a key source of intelligence to Rommel until Australian troops captured it in July 1942. Unkempt hair and slovenly attire are fairly typical.



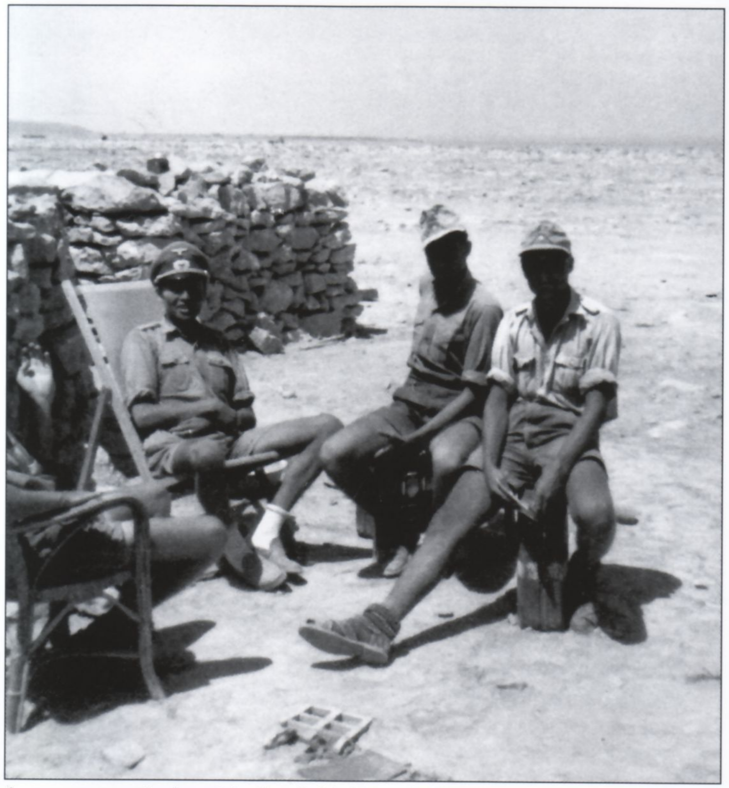
Generalleutnant Crüwell, commander of the *Afrika-Korps*, in March 1942. In this image the M1940 tropical greatcoat can be seen on the left, while the officer on the right wears the M1940 motorcyclist's greatcoat in olive rubberized canvas; on the far right the wounded officer wears a *Schirmmütze.*



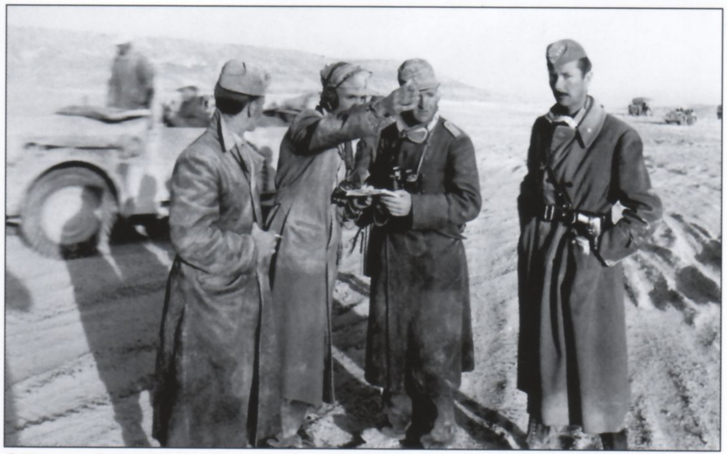
Officer of the *Panzerarmee Afrika*. His silver embroidered eagle is visible. His Italian comrade sports engineer collar piping.



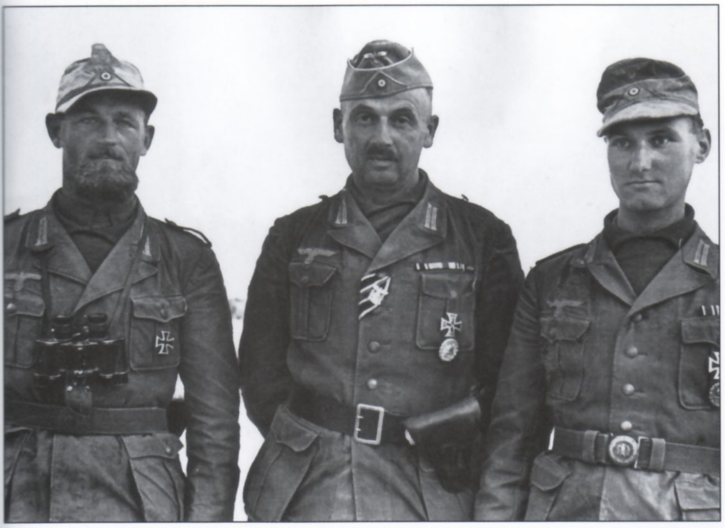
Officers wearing enlisted men's field caps and greatcoats.



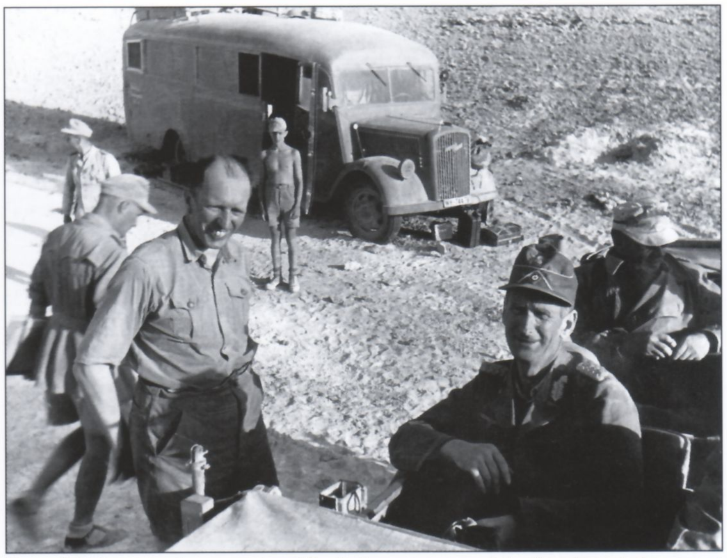
A rare moment of rest in the field. Even Italian deckchairs from a Libyan beach are being used.



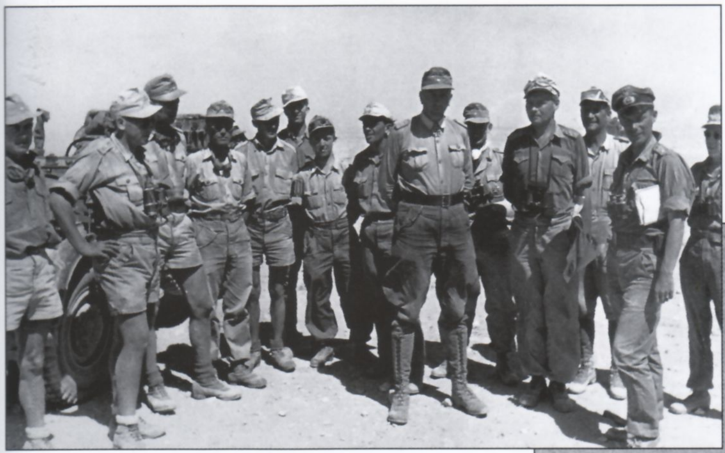
Officers of the *CAM* (*Corpo d'Armata Motorizzato* – Motorized Army Corps) completely covered in dust. They have coarse gray-green greatcoats of continental origin. The Italian officer on the right sports a British khaki drab side cap.



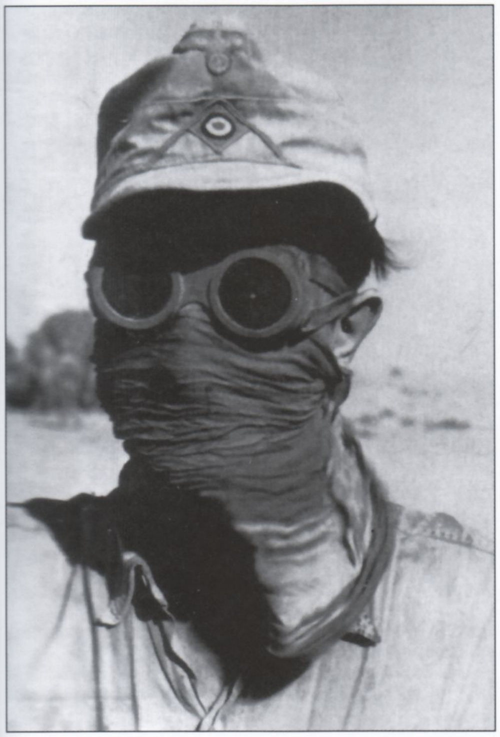
A rather interesting study of a German officer in North Africa. The man in the center has an M1938 gray-green *Feldmütze*. We can observe the common fashion of moustaches and beards among the Afrika-Korps personnel. Many of them were of Austrian, South Tyrolean, or Bohemian origin. (See Plates L3 and N2)



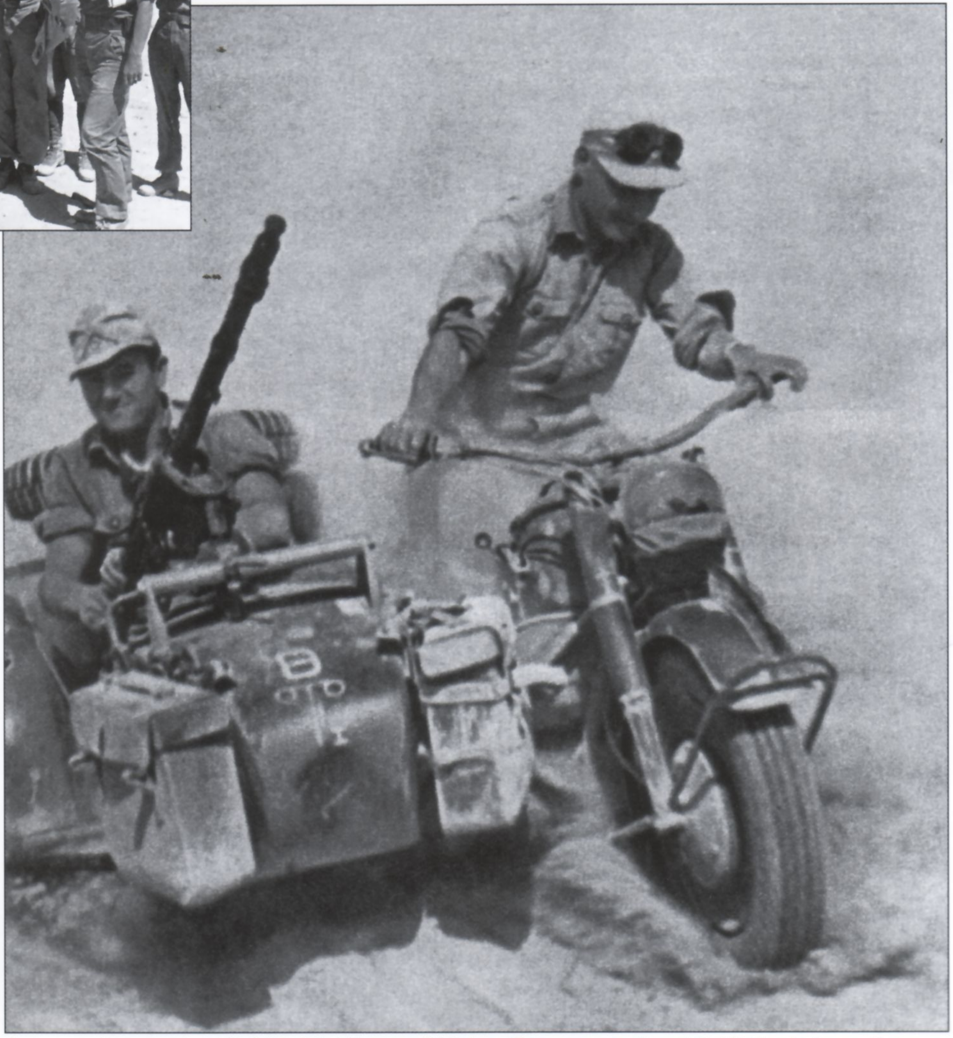
Even DAK generals wore simplified olive-green garb in the desert. Apparent in the background is a Pullman version of the Opel Blitz in *panzergrau* color.



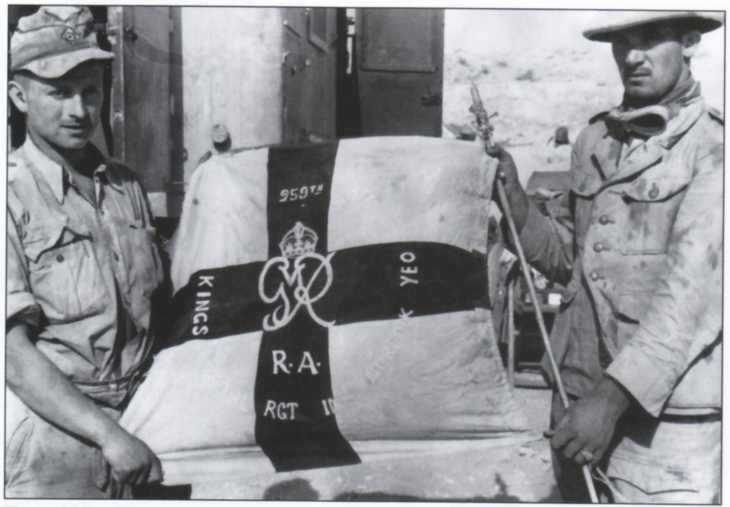
An assorted group of *Afrika-Korps* officers around their commander.



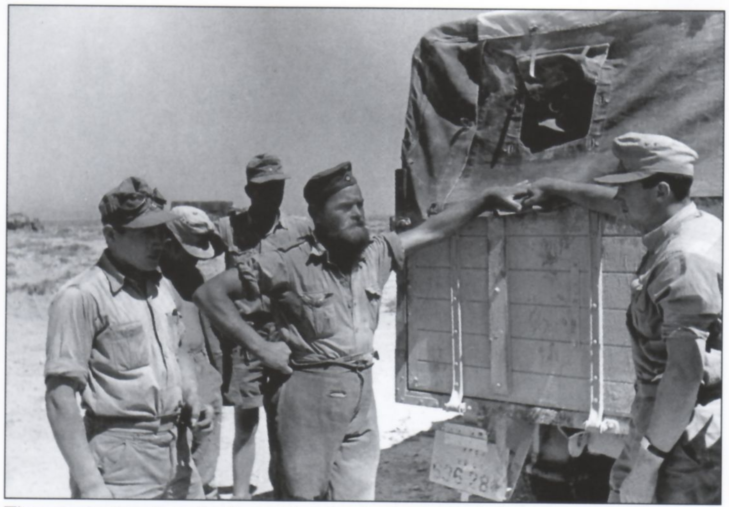
This *Afrika-Korps* veteran sports his worn tropical cap with inverted "V" *Waffenfarbe* and *Zeiss Umbral* sand-sun goggles and scarf.



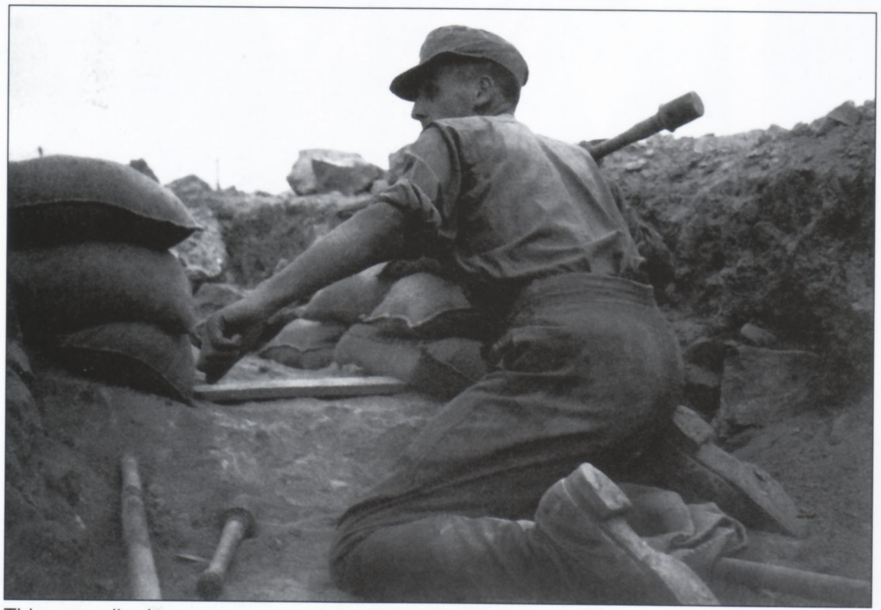
A reconnaissance patrol of the 21st Panzer Division. One can see the pink *Waffenfarbe* on the man on the left. The BMW R75 machine still has traces of a *panzergrau* color visible under its sand coat.



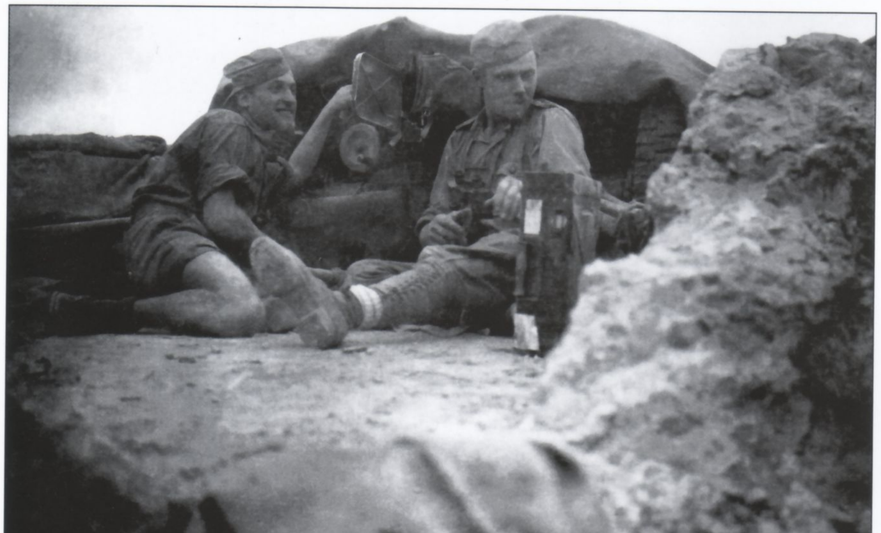
Two *Afrika-Korps* veterans proudly show off a captured battle flag of the British 259th Battery, Norfolk Yeomanry Regiment. Note on the left the handmade tropical cap with insignia.



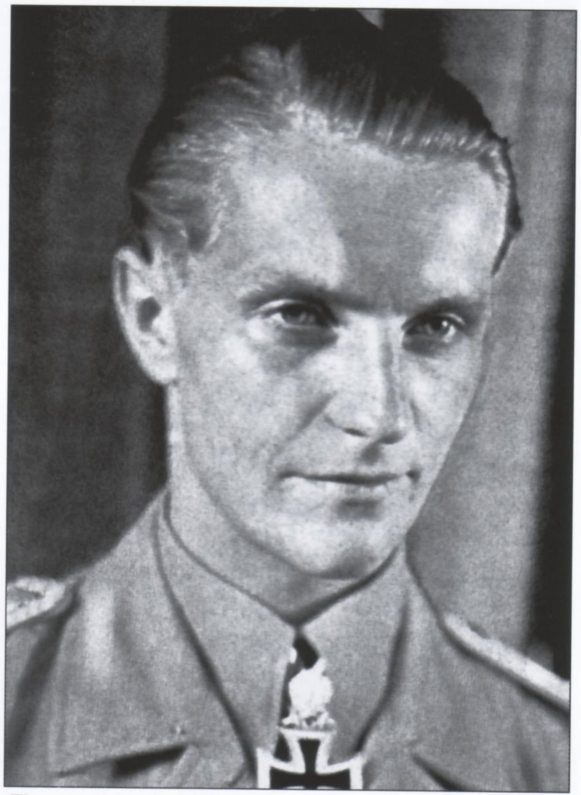
The war in the desert often obliged rather practical dress, frequently without rank epaulettes. The bearded character seen in this photo is probably a member of the *Sonderverband 288* commandos. These men grew long beards and dressed in Arab garments to operate behind enemy lines. This habit is confirmed by a former officer of X Italian *Arditi.* (See Plate H3)



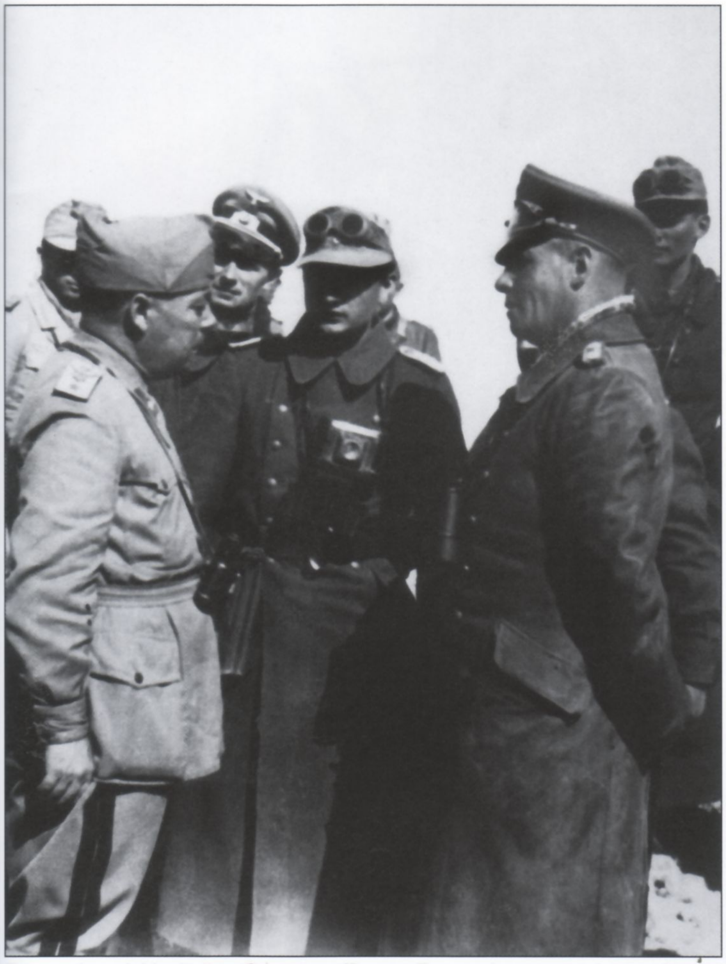
This grenadier has very worn early-pattern ankle boots with no nails.



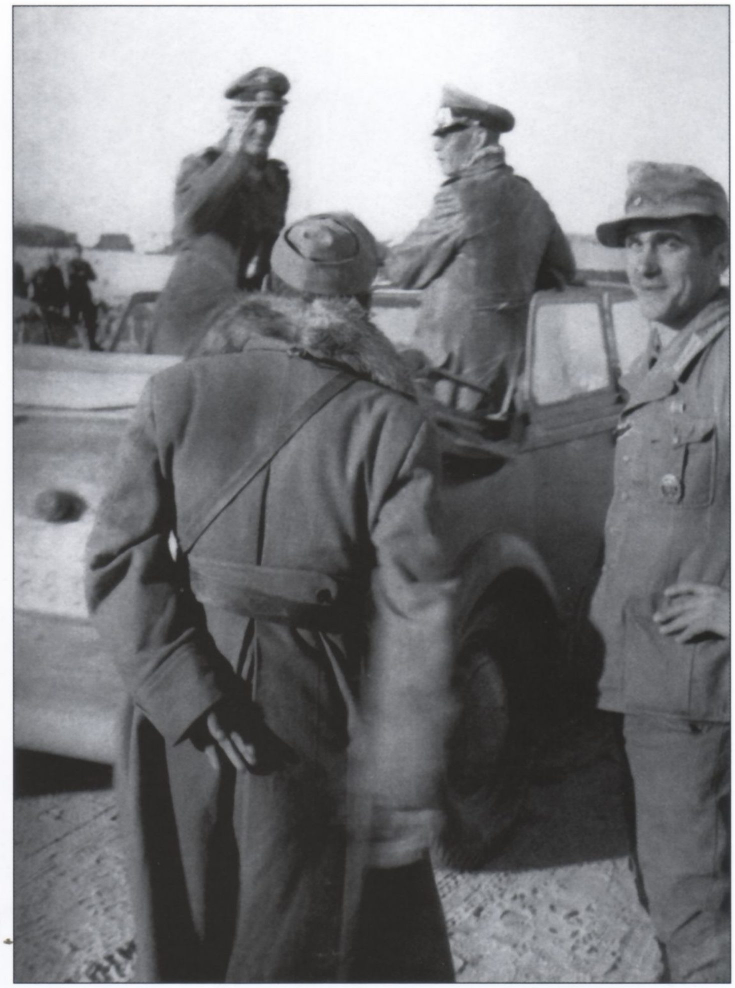
A 3.7cm Pak anti-tank gun crew. The visor of the tropical cap is turned back so he can look into the gun sight.



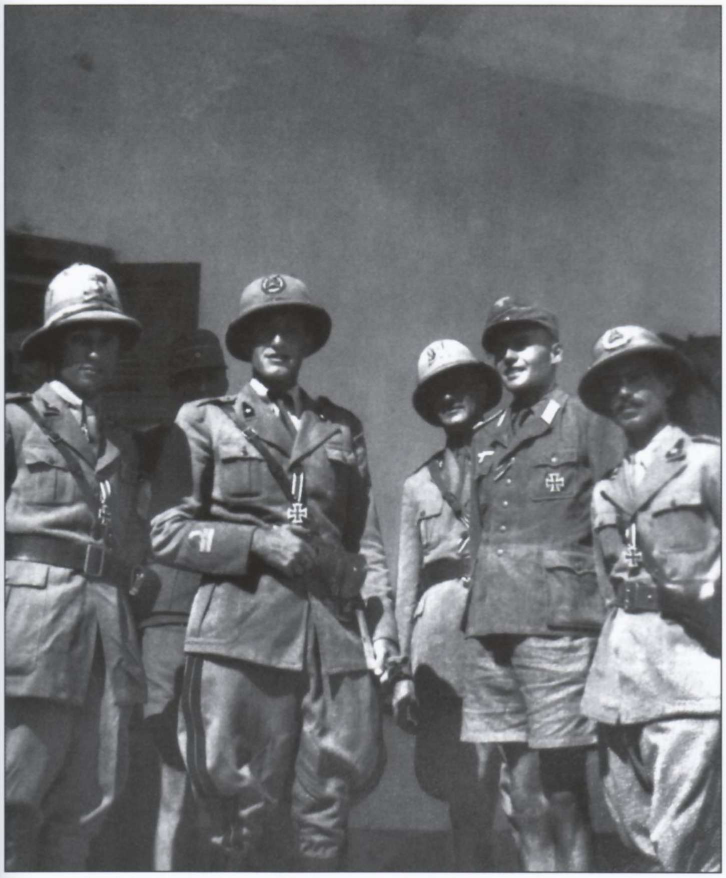
The well-known German fighter ace, *Oberleutnant* Marseille, adorned in his desert garb, along with his Knight's Cross with swords and oak leaves. Early summer of 1942. (See Plate L3)



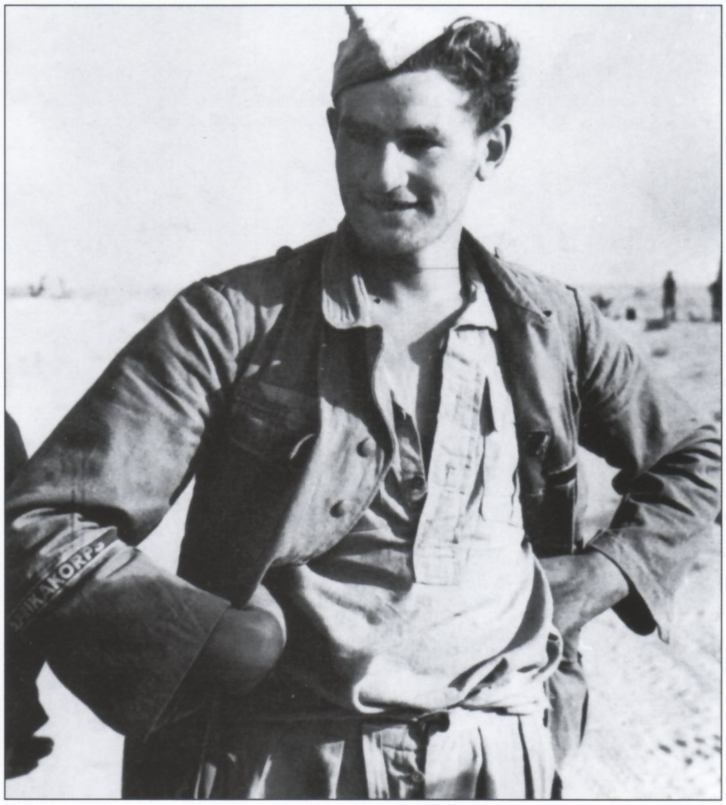
Rommel and his Italian-German officers. Rommel wears a heavy brown woolen greatcoat.



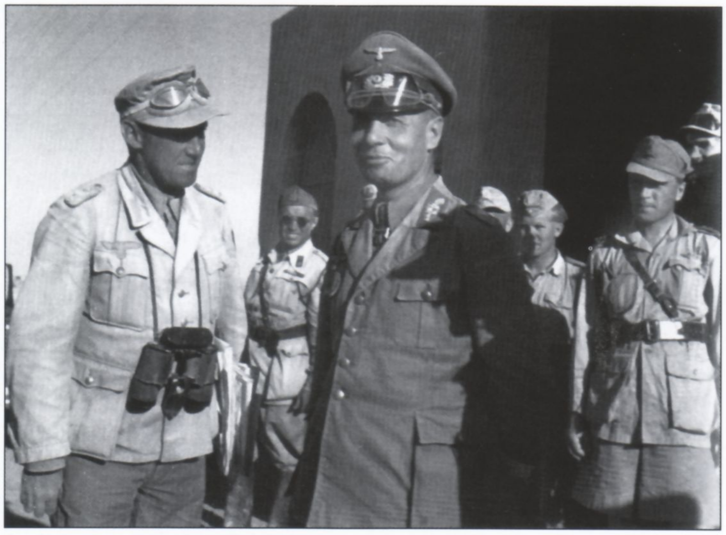
A visit by Rommel to his Italian comrades. Note the "Hebron" coat collar taken from a British officer, who is pictured in the foreground.



This study shows clearly the difference between obsolete Italian desert dress and the modern German counterpart. Of interest are the brass badges on the Italian cork helmets.

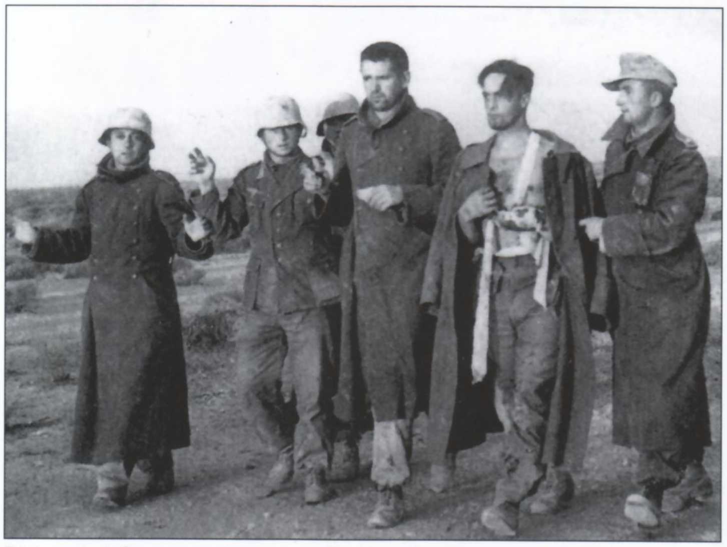


Highlighted is the 2nd pattern *Afrika-Korps* armband.

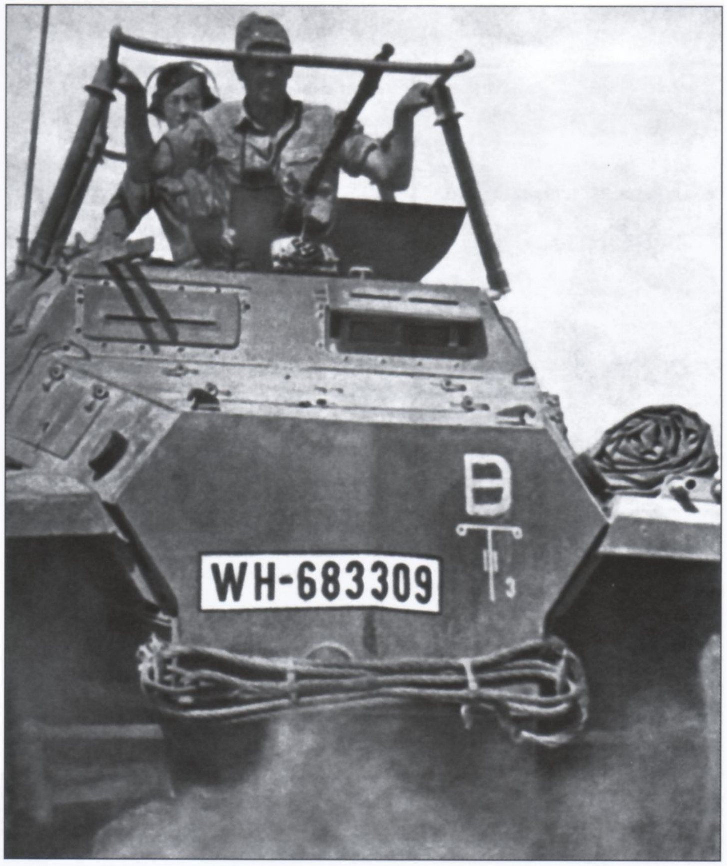


An Axis group watches Rommel and his reliable *Chef des Stabes* Bayerlein, who wears an enlisted man's tropical uniform.

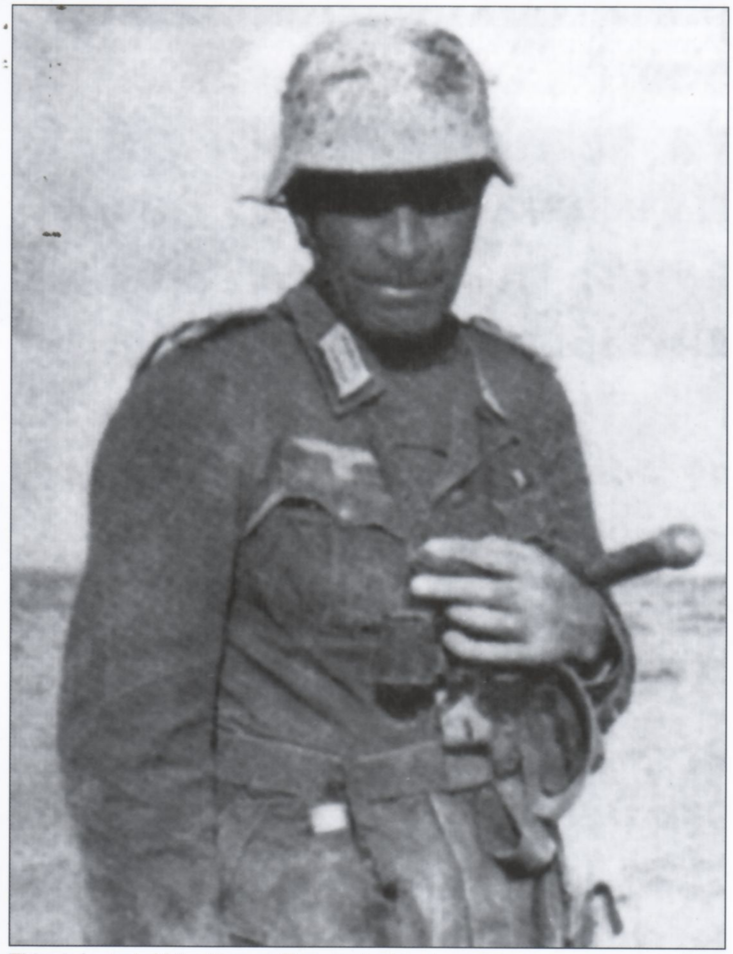
These men were both wounded on the eve of the battle of El Alamein.



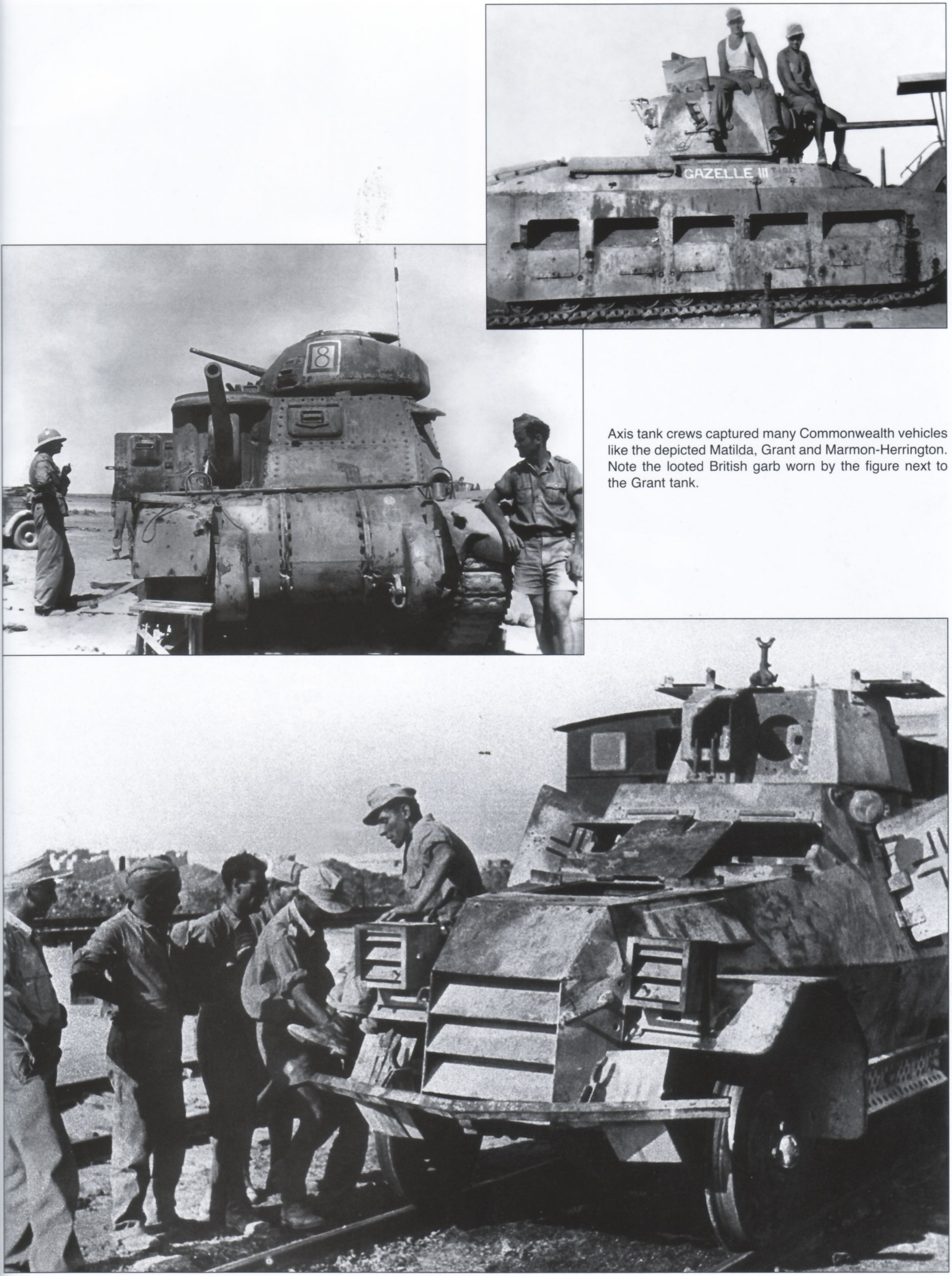
Disheveled German prisoners at El Alamein. They have the *Afrika* M1940 greatcoat in coarse brown wool, and sand-painted helmets.



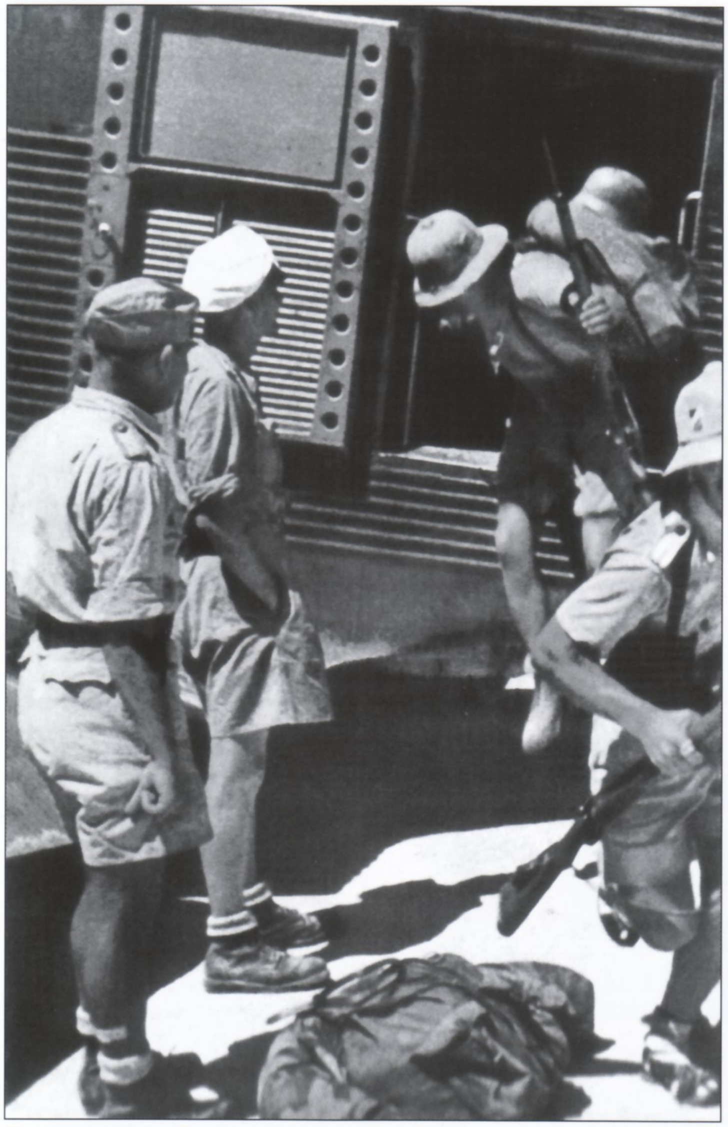
A fairly typical photo of the 21st Panzer Division. Note the vehicle, the black side caps and the garments that are of a pinkish-sand color.



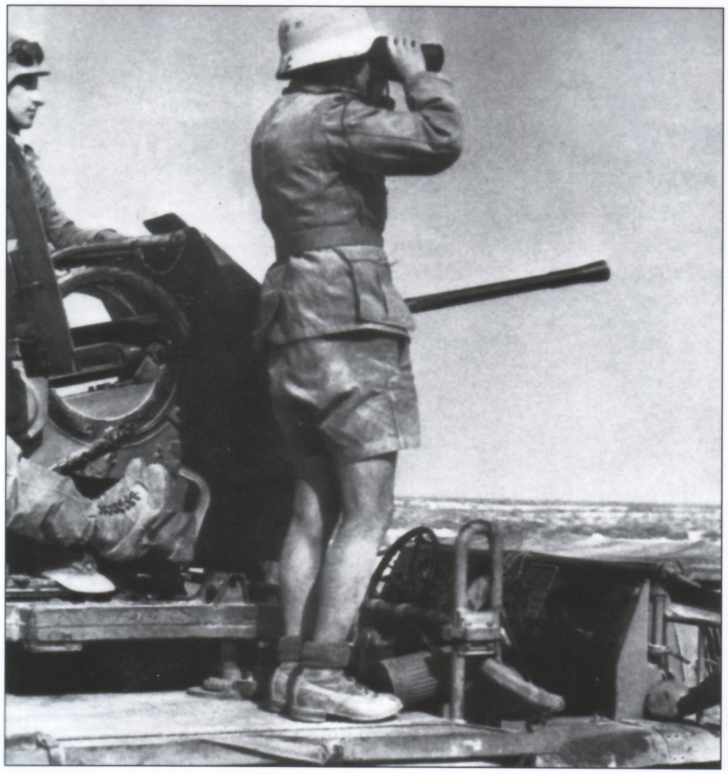
This defeated *Afrika-Korps* officer is depicted wearing a sage green uniform and a helmet painted a light sand color. Note the handle of the entrenching tool, a piece of equipment used for disposing of "bodily function products". (See Plate J3)

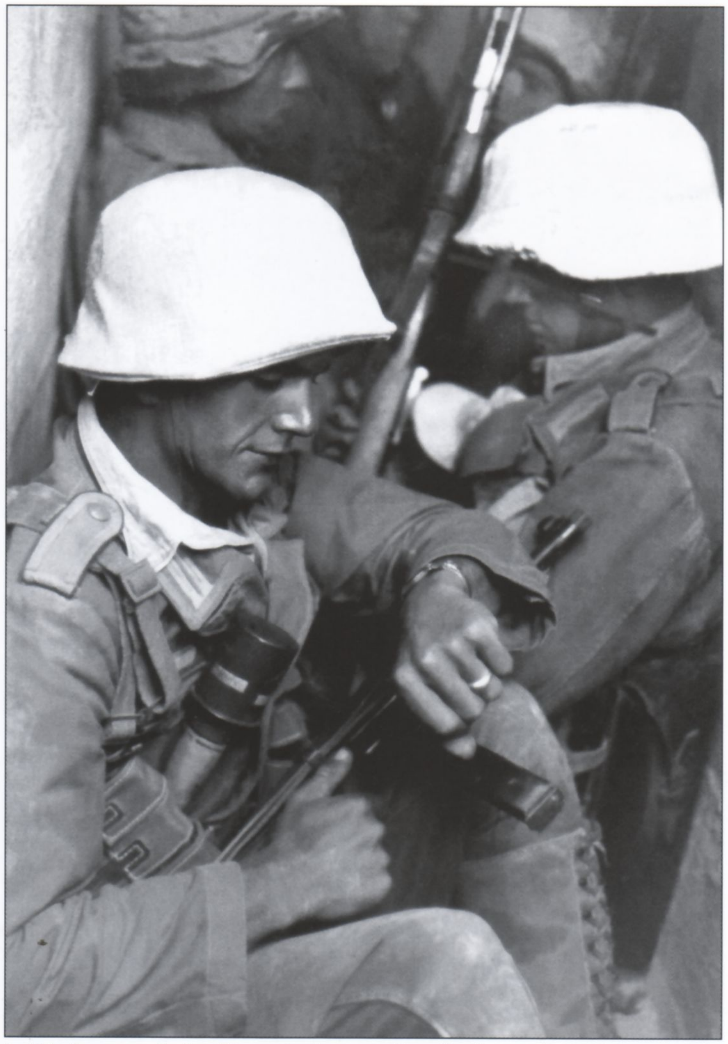


Axis tank crews captured many Commonwealth vehicles like the depicted Matilda, Grant and Marmon-Herrington. Note the looted British garb worn by the figure next to the Grant tank.

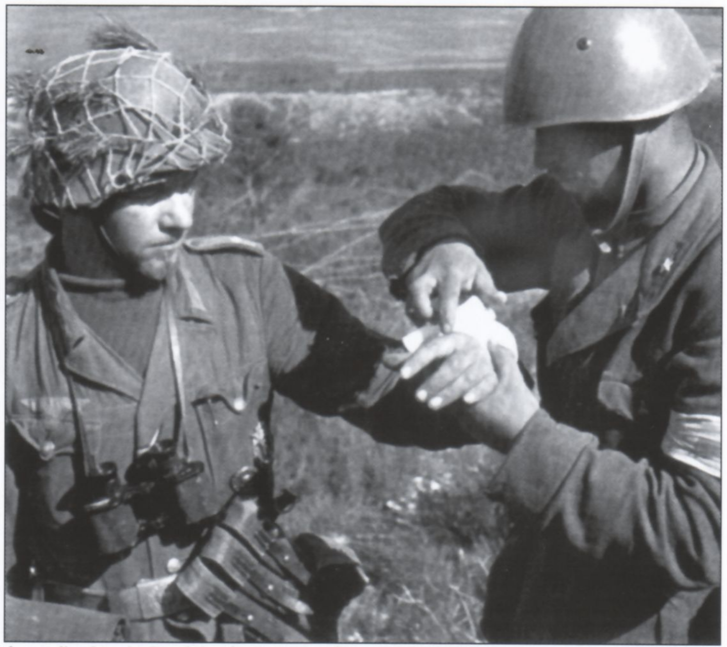


The arrival of the Ramcke *Fallschirmjäger* Brigade in the summer of 1942. We can see sand tropical garments, white *Schirmmütze,* and in the foreground, a camouflage smock.



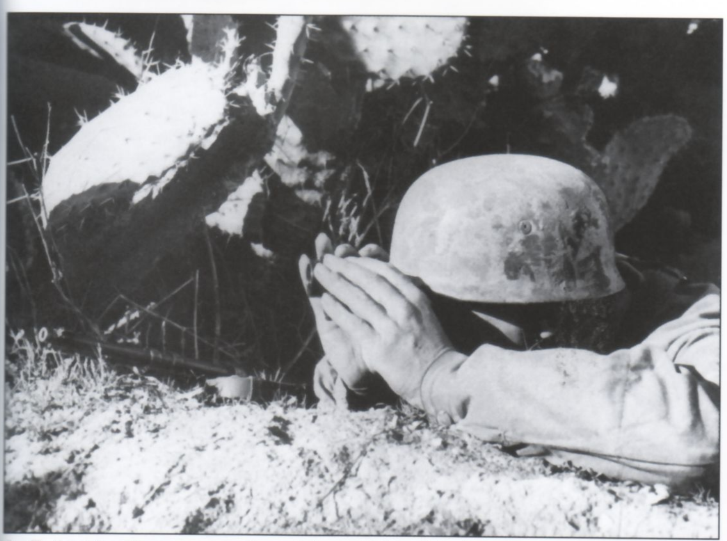


In this famous study, *Sturmpioniere* awaiting the hour of attack have white helmet covers and shoulder straps.

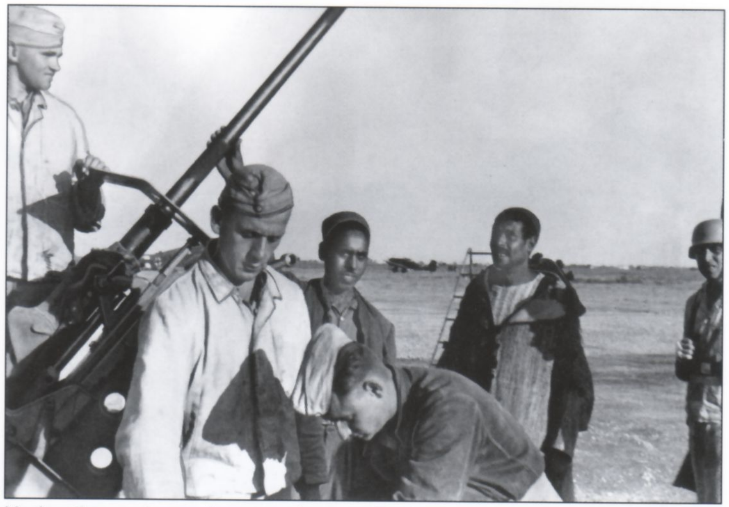


A medical orderly of the Italian "*La Spezia*" Division takes care of his German comrade. The latter has a helmet painted olive green, a reed green uniform, and a pullover.

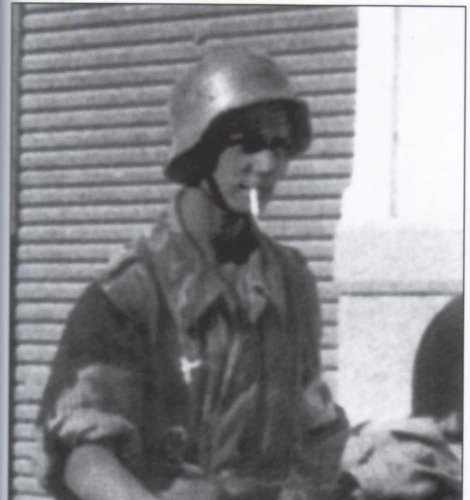
Some motorized gunners - note the steel helmet (*Stahlhelm*) painted in a bone white color.



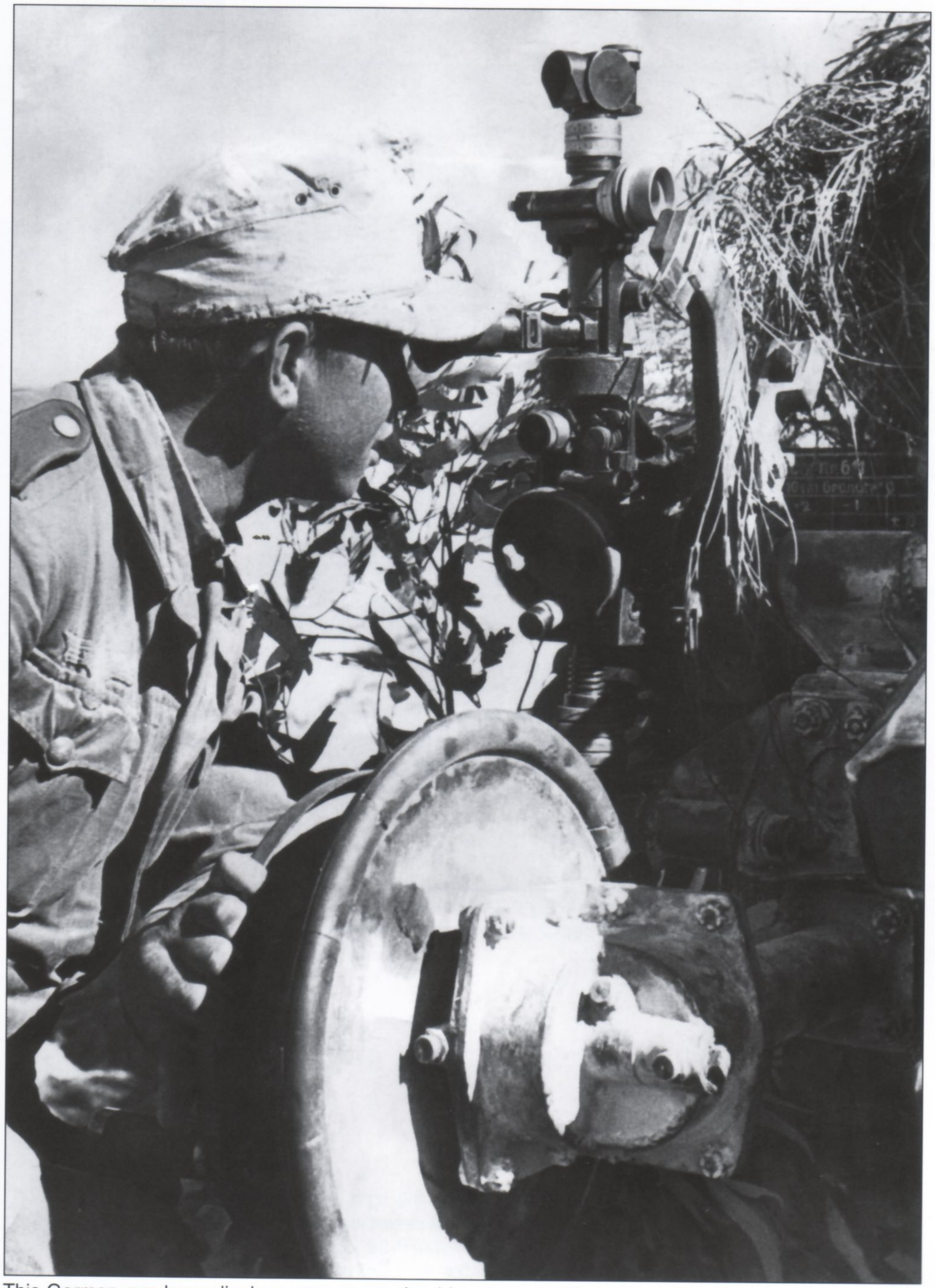
A *Fallschirmjäger* camouflaged in a field of Indian figs. His M1938 jump helmet is camouflaged with mud. Tunisia, early 1943.



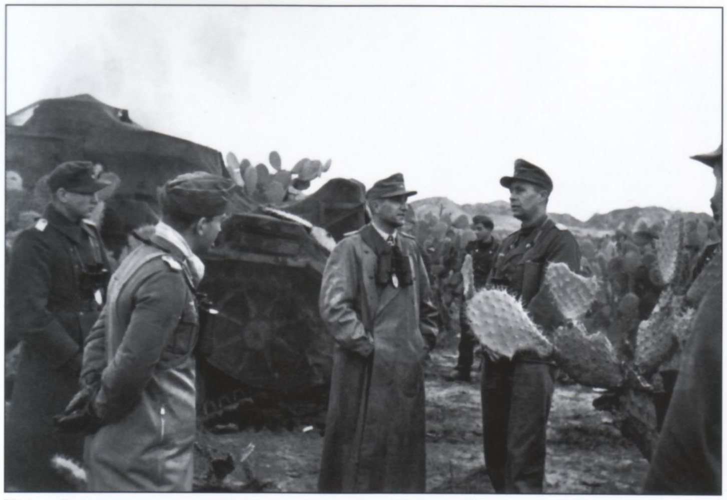
Under the curious glances of some Tunisians, a Flak crew member is dressed in fatigues (Arbeitsanzug) in a white canvas material.



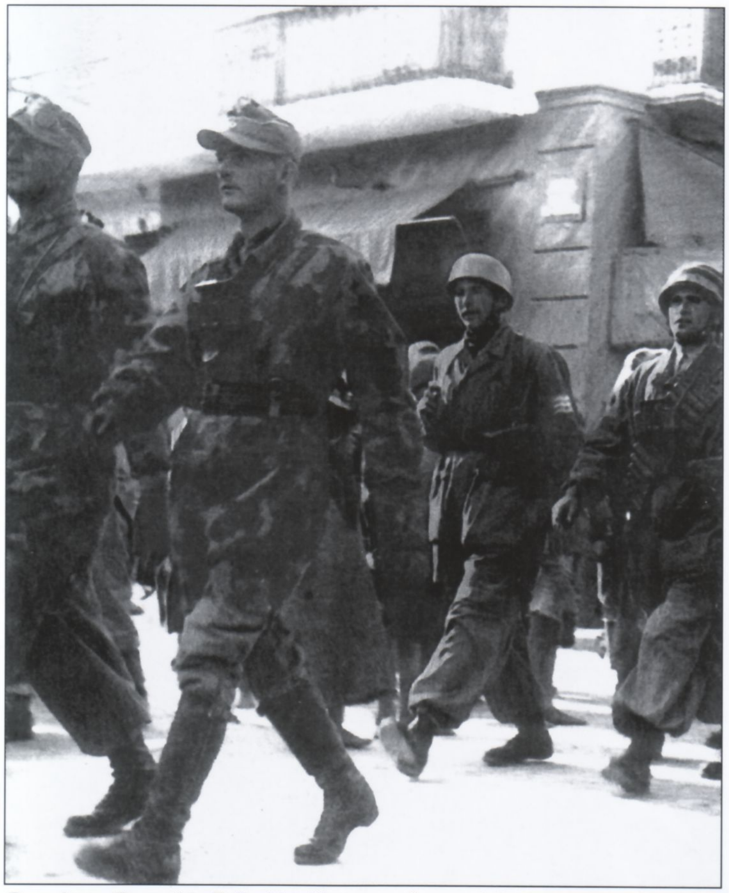
A medical orderly, possibly from Luftwaffe *Jäger* in Tunisia, 1943. He wears a sand colored M1943 *Stahlhelm*.



This German gun layer displays gray-green shoulder straps on his tropical shirt. Tunisia, 1943.

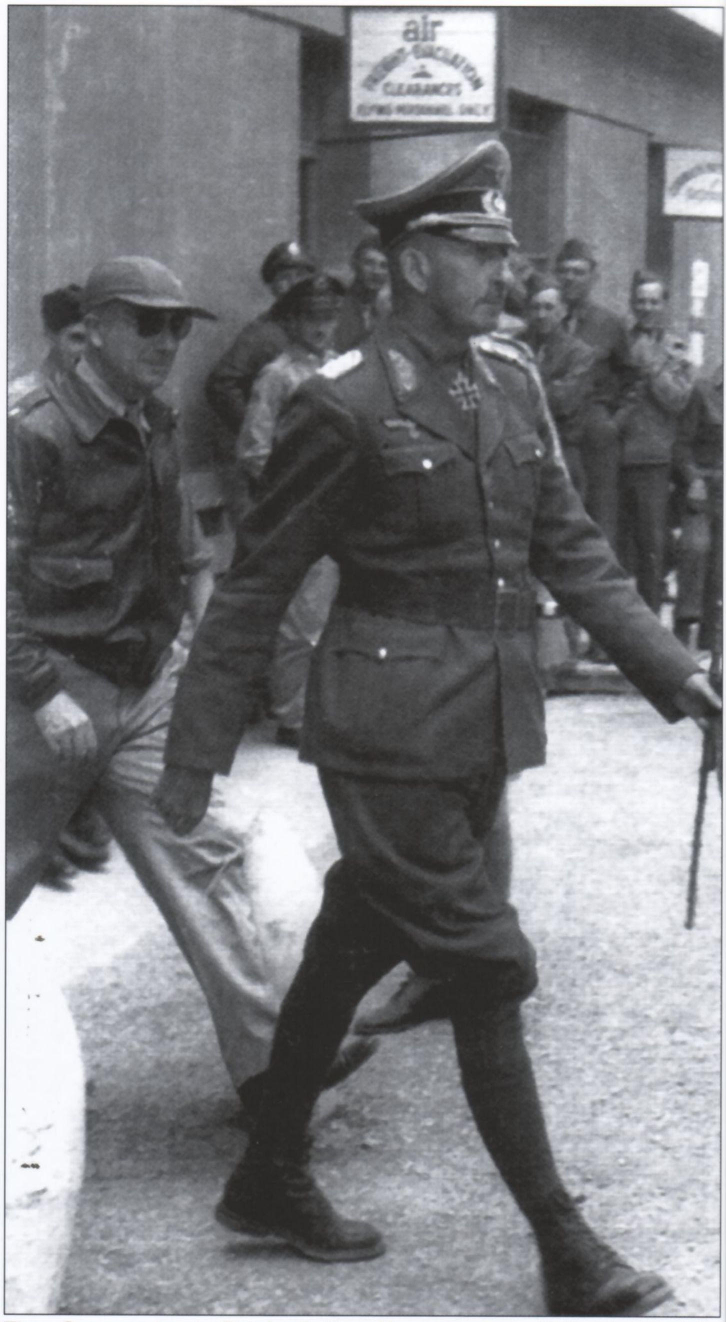


This disparate group of *Heeresgruppe Afrika* officers shows a gray-green M1940 continental greatcoat, British captured gear (in khaki drab), and an M1940 motorcyclist's greatcoat. Tunisia, 1943.

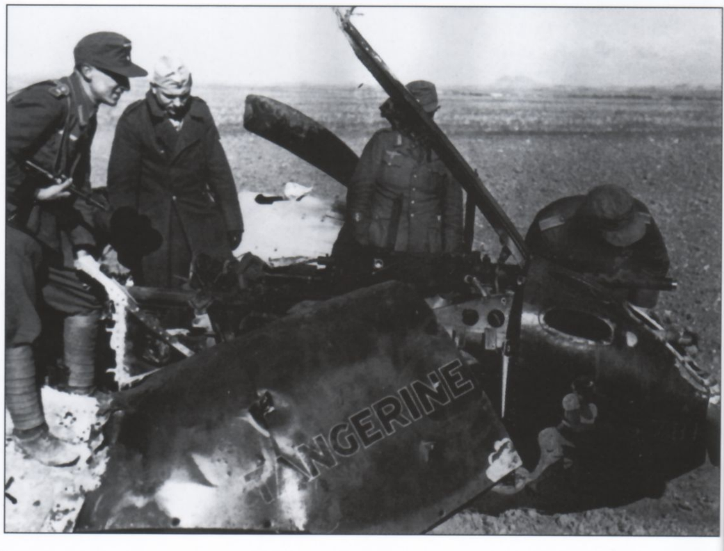


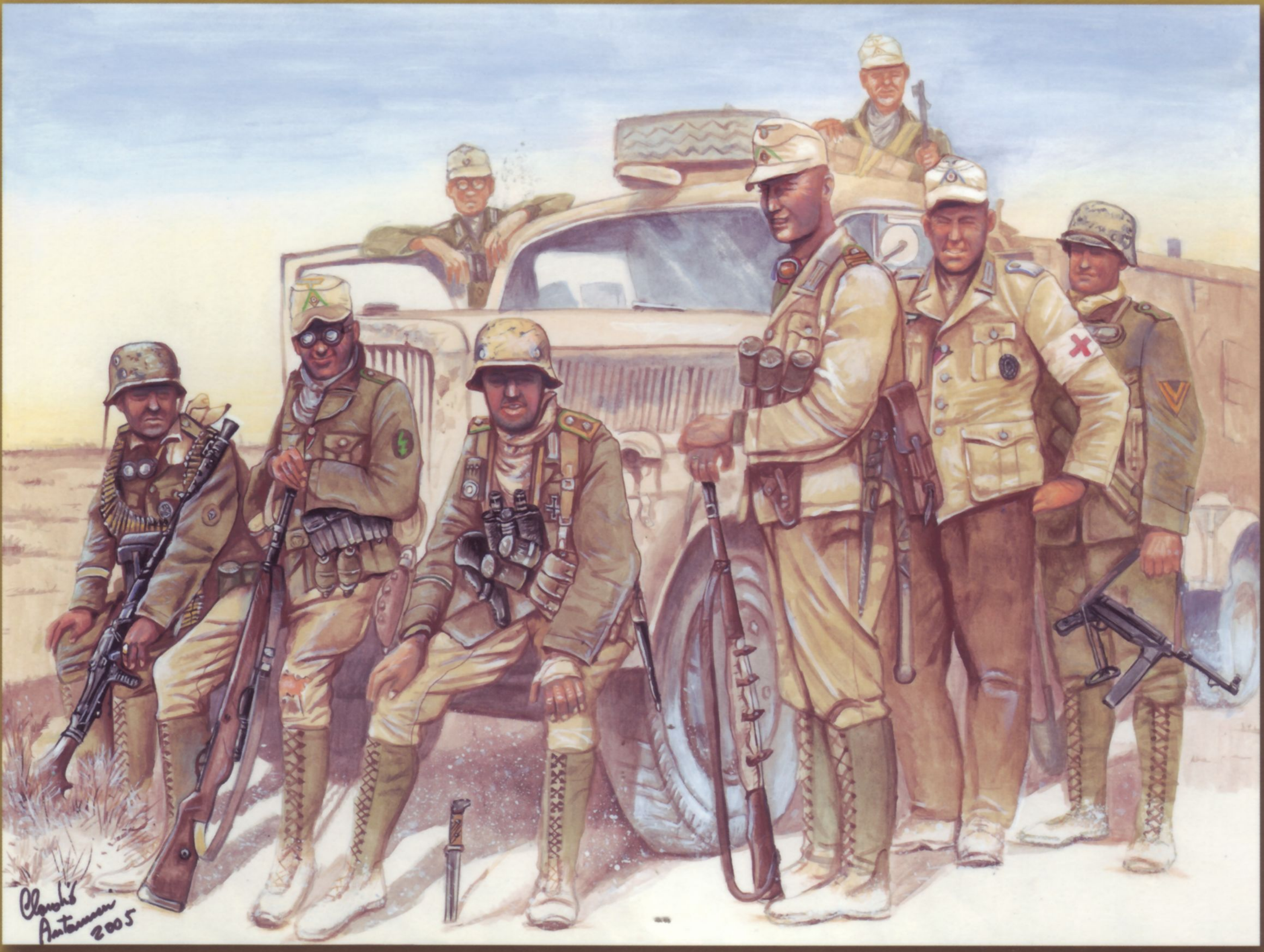
Ramcke or *Barenthin Fallschirmjäger* proudly march in the streets of Tunis in the spring of 1943. The men in the center wear special Luftwaffe tropical boots.

Despite this *Jäger* lacking his Edelweiss arm badge on the right sleeve, he wears the puttees of the mountain troops even in the hot desert climate. With his companions he is examining a shot-down American P-38 Lightning. A medic ('Sani') can be identified by the insignia on his right sleeve. Tunisia, 1943.



The Commander–in-Chief of the *Heeresgruppe Afrika* in Tunisia, *Generaloberst* von Arnim. He is dressed in the simplest tropical style without decorations, but with socks.

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